TALES FROM THE INDIAN EPICS

PRINCE ANSHUMAT AND THE OLD WOMAN

(See p. 114

TALES FROM THE INDIAN EPICS

BY

C. A. KINCAID, C. V. O., I. C. S.

AUTHOR OF 'ISHTUR PHAKDE', 'THE INDIAN HEROES', 'DECCAN NURSERY TALES', 'THE TALE OF THE TULSI PLANT', 'THE OUTLAWS OF KATHIAWAR'

With Six Illustrations

By M. V. Dhurandhar

HUMPHREY MILFORD
OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS
BOMBAY AND MADRAS
1918

TO MY LITTLE DAUGHTER SHEILA
THIS BOOK
OF INDIAN STORIES
IS AFFECTIONATELY
INSCRIBED

GR305
K56
1918
MAIN

CONTENTS

PAGE

The Churning of the Ocean 7
Veda's Pupil 13
King Janamejaya's Snake Sacrifice . . 23
Vrigu and Agni 44
Ruru and Pramadvara 47
Nala and Damayanti 52
Satyavan and Savitri 88
The Frog King's Daughter 101
The Descent of the Ganges 112
The Tale of the Pole Star . . . 124

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Prince Anshumat and the Old Woman *Frontispiece*

PAGE

King Parikshit and the Rishi . . . 35
Damayanti and the Swan 55
Nala and Damayanti 85
King Parikshit and the Frog King's Daughter 103
Queen Suruchi and Dhruv 125

446901

PREFACE

The favourable reception given by the Indian public to the "Indian Heroes" has led me to write a companion book. In the "Indian Heroes" I confined myself to the actual doings of the heroes themselves. In the "Tales from the Indian Epics" I have told a series of stories which are incidentally related in the Ramayana and Mahabharata.

Eight of the following stories will be found either in the Adi Parva or the Vana Parva of the Mahabharata. "The Descent of the Ganges" will be found in the Ramayana Balam Kandam. To these I have added the tenth story, "The Tale of the Pole Star", from the Shrimadbhagvat.

TALES FROM THE INDIAN EPICS

THE CHURNING OF THE OCEAN

ONCE upon a time in the youth of the world there stood to the north of India a mighty mountain named Mount Meru. Its summit shone so brightly that the sun's rays, when they struck it, shivered and fell away. One day the lesser gods gathered in council upon its peak, for they wished to obtain the ambrosia which would make them immortal like the three supreme gods, Vishnu, Brahmadeva and Shiva. Now the jar in which the ambrosia was kept lay at the bottom of the ocean and none of the lesser gods could conceive a plan by which they could obtain possession of it. As they sat in council, there came to them the great god Vishnu, and the lesser gods asked him for his advice. Vishnu answered them, saying, "Call the demons to your aid and churn the ocean. When you have churned it, not only will you get the ambrosia, but you will get a great store of jewels and other precious things besides."

The lesser gods followed the counsel of Vishnu, left the summit of Mount Meru and withdrew to another great mountain named Mount Mandara. Its peak was not resplendent like that of Mount Meru. Its sides were covered with dense forests, through which roamed elephants and lions, tigers and leopards. The lesser gods seized the great mountain and tried to uproot it so that they might churn the ocean with it, as the Lord Vishnu had advised. But although they strove

their utmost, the great mass of Mount Mandara moved not a hair's breadth. The celestials, finding their strength unequal to the task, sought out the great gods Vishnu and Brahmadeva. "Great lords," they said, "tell us, we pray you, how we may uproot Mandara Mountain, for without it we cannot churn the ocean and win the ambrosia." Lord Vishnu called to him Vasuki the king of the snake people and said to him, "O Snake King, the command that I lay upon you is this. Go with the lesser gods and help them uproot Mandara Mountain." Vasuki, the king of the snake people, obeyed Lord Vishnu, and going with the lesser gods to Mount Mandara, he fastened round it his endless coils. Then pressing them against the base of the mountain he tore it up by the roots. Together the Snake King and the lesser gods rolled the mountain to the shores of the ocean. "Lord Ocean," they said, "we desire the ambrosia which lies fathoms deep below your surface. And to win it we shall churn your water with the Mandara Mountain." "As you will," said the ocean. "Give me but a draught of the ambrosia and I will gladly allow you to churn my waters."

Hearing the words of the ocean the lesser gods were glad, and, as the Lord Vishnu had advised them, they bade the demons join them. Then gods and demons went together to the king of the tortoises. They found him in his palace and said to him. "O Tortoise King, come to our aid, we pray you. For we have resolved to churn the ocean with Mount Mandara that we may win the ambrosia. But if we place Mount Mandara on the bottom of the ocean it will sink into the sands. Come, therefore, O King of the Tortoises, and

lie at the bottom of the ocean. For if you bear it on your mighty back, we shall be able to pull Mount Mandara to and fro and so churn the ocean." The Tortoise King consented, and with the gods and the demons walked to the shores of the ocean. When they had reached the edge of the water, the god Indra, the chief of the lesser gods, by means of many cunning instruments, placed Mount Mandara upon the back of the king of the tortoises. Bearing this mighty burden the king of the tortoises entered the ocean, and walked along its bottom until he reached the deepest part. Then Vasuki the Snake King swam out across the surface of the water until he reached the spot where the top of Mount Mandara stood high above the waves. Coiling himself round the great mountain he bade the lesser gods hold him by the tail and the demons hold his head. Demons and gods seized him as he bade them, and pulling him backwards and forwards they began to churn the ocean. Great masses of foam rose upon the waters. Clouds of vapour issued from the mouth of the Snake King Vasuki and scorched the faces of the demons who pulled the Snake King's head. Then rising higher the vapour descended in cooling rain to refresh the lesser gods. And the forest flowers torn from the sides of Mount Mandara by the coils of the Snake King were wafted abroad by the winds and fell softly upon their faces. The gods and demons pulled the mountain summit backwards and forwards through the air so swiftly that the forests upon it caught fire. But the god Indra opened the windows of heaven and the rain fell in torrents on the fire and extinguished it. Yet although gods and demons toiled without ceasing until their strength was spent, nothing rose from

the surface of the ocean. The lesser gods and the demons then went to the court of Brahmadeva and said, "O father of the gods, we are exhausted with labour and can work no more, yet the ambrosia has not been won." Brahmadeva begged the Lord Vishnu to give the gods and demons greater strength, that they might continue the churning. This the Lord Vishnu did, and they swung Mount Mandara to and fro until the foam of the churned ocean rose almost higher than the great mountain itself. At last a pale yellow disk began slowly to rise from the ocean. It rose right out of the waters high into the sky, and, ever since, as the moon, has at night time shed its pale light over the earth. Next there rose from the waters an elephant larger than mortal mind could have imagined. Two enormous white tusks stretched many yards in front of him. His eyes were like red ponds, and his trunk seemed to rival in length the great coils of the Snake King himself. Indra called the mighty beast to him and soothing it with his hand, said, "You shall be known hereafter as Airavat and shall be my servant always." Still the churning continued and there rose from the sea the prettiest maid who had ever been seen in the three worlds. Her long black lashes drooped upon a pair of rosy cheeks. Her hair curled in golden rings over an ivory forehead. Her eyes were bluer than the sky above. Indra called her to him. "You shall hereafter be called Rambha," he said, "and you shall be chief among my dancing girls."

Harder still the gods and demons toiled at the churning, until there rose from the waters the most awful vision of beauty that eyes human or divine had ever seen. From a perfect face two eyes of deepest

grey looked out. Thy gazed unblinking into space. But so grave was their expression and so full of wisdom that neither demon nor god, except Vishnu alone, dared meet their look. A moment later, amid an awed hush, Vishnu stepped forward and took the lovely woman by the hand. "You shall be called Lakshmi," he said, "and you shall be my queen."

Backwards and forwards swung Mount Mandara. Then from a distance the gods and demons saw a fair woman coming towards them. In each hand she carried a jar, but when she came close, they saw that her expression was evil and that great lines marred her features and that black pits lay under her eyes. They let the strange woman pass, and she made her way to the dry earth. There, known as Sura or the wine goddess, she has dwelt ever since.

Again they churned until there rose above the waves a pure white horse. It was the most beautifully shaped horse that has ever lived on earth before or since. It swam through the billows until it reached the shore. when it thundered out of sight at full gallop.

"Let its name be Uchaisrava," said Indra, and the gods and the demons once more bent to the churning. Then there rose above the foam the most marvellous jewel that eyes have ever beheld. Set in a vast plate of gold were emeralds like the green pools of an Indian village and sapphires like the blue lakes in the Himalaya mountains. Vast rubies shone out of masses of diamonds huge as rocks of crystal. The Lord Vishnu stepped forward and fastened the sea jewel round his neck. There, known as Kaustubha, it has hung ever since.

Still they churned, the gods and demons, until a

strange ripple spread over the waters and a terrible stench rose from it. The head and tail of the giant snake dropped gradually out of the hands of the fainting churners. Even Vasuki's eyes became dull and his coils began to slip inertly off Mount Mandara's sides. Suddenly the god Shiva placed his mouth on the waves near the ripple, and sucking it in, saved the three worlds. For this was the terrible Vish—the poisonous fluid which overlaid the ambrosia to guard it. If the Lord Shiva had not drunk it, it would have destroyed alike the lesser gods, demons and men. As the Lord Shiva swallowed it, it burnt a deep blue mark on his throat. And he has ever since been known as Nilkantha or Blue-throat.

When the fumes of the Vish had passed away, the gods and demons churned once more. At last an aged man rose slowly through the masses of the ocean foam. In his right hand he carried a gold jar of exquisite workmanship from which issued a perfume of delicious fragrance. At the sight of the aged man, whom they knew to be Dhanwantari, the demons snatched the ambrosia from his hands, trying to rob the gods of their share. But the Lord Vishnu took it back from them. And to punish them for their greed he poured out the ambrosia to the gods only, who drank it and at once became immortal, while the demons, who drank none of it, have remained mortal to this day.

But one of the demons, Rahu by name, took the form of a celestial, and deceiving the Lord Vishnu received a draught of ambrosia. As the demon drank, the sun-god pierced his disguise and told the Lord Vishnu of his deceit. Vishnu, lifting his discus, shore off the head of Rahu with it before the ambrosia had

passed his throat. Rahu's body fell to the ground, and, being mortal, soon rotted. But his head, having taken the ambrosia, is immortal and still endures.

But because the sun-god detected him as he drank the divine liquid, and told Vishnu, Rahu's head bears to the sun-god an undying hatred. Sometimes he steals up unperceived close to the bright sun-god and with a single bite swallows him. But because Rahu has no body, the sun-god in due course reappears through his enemy's throat and once again begins to shine upon the earth in all his former splendour.

And then men gather together and say that there has been an eclipse of the sun.

VEDA'S PUPIL

Once upon a time there lived in India a great rishi or sage named Veda. According to the custom of those days, he took as his pupil a Brahman boy named Uttanka. Now Veda had, when himself a boy, been the pupil of a very stern anchorite named Dhoumya, and he had suffered much from his master's severity. Remembering his own unhappy youth, Veda treated Uttanka with the greatest kindness. When Uttanka grew to manhood, he remembered gratefully all the care with which Veda had taught him and all the love that his master had shewn him. So Uttanka went to Veda and said:

"O my master, tell me how I can return your kindness in some small measure. For it is the custom that the master should receive from his pupil a fee for

his teaching. The pupil who does not pay the fee and the master who will not receive it are alike to blame. And in after years the fault, whether of master or of pupil, will bear fruit, and the love which they should have for each other will be absent, and hatred will take its place."

"Uttanka, my child." said the rishi, with a kindly smile, "I am in want of nothing. So let us wait until the need arises.''

Uttanka waited for some weeks and then again he went to his teacher. "O my master," he said, "I pray you, tell me what I shall bring you as the fee due to you for your teaching."

"My son," said the rishi, "I am still in want of nothing. But as you again press me, I cannot again refuse you. Go therefore to my wife, your mistress, and bid her tell you what you should bring her as a pupil's fee."

Uttanka went to the rishi's wife and, telling her what his teacher had said, begged her to say what she wished, so that he might bring it to her as a return for Veda's teaching. The saintly lady thought for a moment and then spoke: "Uttanka, my son, four days hence is a sacred day. It will then be my duty to give food to many Brahmans. But I have no ornaments fit for so great an occasion. So go to King Paushya and beg from him the earrings that his queen wears."

Uttanka bowed to the feet of his teacher's wife. And although he knew that King Paushya's palace was many hundred leagues away, he set out on his errand with a brave heart. When he had walked two or three thousand paces he met a giant riding an enormous

bull. The giant was many times a man's height and the bull stood as high as the largest war elephant. "Come here, Uttanka," said the giant, "and eat this food." And as the giant spoke he offered some food to the lad. But Uttanka refused, for he did not know the caste of the giant, and the food looked strange. "Nay, Uttanka," continued the giant, "eat the food and do not fear. Veda, your teacher, has often in the past taken food at my hands."

Uttanka no longer refused. He took the food from the giant's hands, ate it, and then, washing his hands, went on towards the palace of King Paushya. Suddenly although it seemed to Uttanka that he had walked but a few miles, the palace appeared in front of him. He neared the gates and the guards made way for him to pass. Then entering the palace he went boldly on until he reached the great central hall, where King Paushya was seated in state. As Uttanka drew near to the throne the courtiers stepped aside. When the boy faced King Paushya, he saluted him most humbly. "O King," he said, "I come to you as a suppliant." "Fair youth," replied the king, "ask me what you will, and, if I can, I will grant it to you." But as the king spoke, his heart sank within him, because he feared that Uttanka had come to beg his queen's earrings. "My Lord," said Uttanka humbly, "I am a pupil of the rishi Veda, and as a fee for his teaching he has asked me to bring him your queen's earrings. Give them, therefore, to me as a boon given to a suppliant."

The king could not refuse a Brahman suppliant, so he said, "Go yourself, fair youth, into the queen's chamber and ask her to give you the earrings. She will not refuse you." But the queen, knew that Uttanka was

coming and would beg for her earrings. Swiftly she made herself invisible, so that when Uttanka entered her room he could not see her. After searching in vain for the queen, the boy went back to the central hall, and said, "My Lord King, you have deceived me. I went to the queen's chamber, but I did not find her."

"Fair youth," replied King Paushya, "the queen could not have hidden herself had you been wholly pure. You must, therefore, have neglected to wash your hands after your last meal."

"No, my Lord King," said Uttanka; "I washed my hands when last I ate. But I was in haste and washed them as I walked."

"Fair youth," said King Paushya, "it is a sin to wash one's hands as one walks. You are impure, and therefore the queen hid herself from you. For she is a chaste and faultless lady, and she will not shew herself to one who is not wholly pure."

Uttanka left the palace, and going to a fountain sat on the ground with his face to the East. He washed his hands and feet and bathed his face. He sipped water three times. He then wiped his face twice and touched his eyes and ears with water. Then once more he entered the queen's apartment. This time the queen did not hide herself. Pleased with the care with which Uttanka had purified himself, she saluted him courteously and said, "Welcome, reverend Sir; tell me what you wish done and I will do it for you."

"Noble Queen," said Uttanka, "I pray you to give me your earrings. I wish to give them as pupil's fee to my preceptor."

The queen took off her earrings and handed them to Uttanka. And as Uttanka took them he marvelled

at their beauty. For they were heavy with pearls and rubies. And huge diamonds and sapphires and emeralds blazed back silver and blue and green in the sunlight that streamed through the window. As he gazed at them, the queen said, "Yes, fair youth, they are very beautiful. But be careful. For Takshaka, one of the princes of the snake people, desires them and will attempt to rob you of them."

"Noble Queen," said Uttanka proudly, "have no fear. For Takshaka, snake prince though he be, could never overcome me."

Uttanka left the queen's room and went back to the king. "My Lord, King Paushya," he said, "you have treated me most courteously, and I am very grateful to you. Be so good, therefore, as to accept a Brahman's thanks. For there is nothing else that I can give you."

"Fair youth," said King Paushya, "a Brahman's thanks are reward enough. But do not hasten away. I am about to sacrifice to my father's spirit.[1] Stay and eat with me in honour of the dead."

Uttanka gladly accepted the invitation, and King Paushya and he sat down together to eat. But the food that was placed before Uttanka was cold and had been cooked by a woman with unbraided hair. One of her hairs had fallen into it and had thus made the food unclean. Uttanka was stung by the insult. "King Paushya," he said angrily, "because you have given me unclean food, you shall lose your sight." On hearing the curse, King Paushya grew as angry as Uttanka. "Brahman youth," he cried, "you have called food that is clean unclean. You will therefore never have a son born to you."

---

1 The Shradh ceremony.

Uttanka was dismayed at the curse and begged King Paushya to see the food himself. And the king, going to where Uttanka sat, saw that the food was cold and that it had a hair in it. So he said, "Forgive me, Brahman youth. The food set before you was cold and had a hair in it, and therefore was, as you said, unclean. I spoke rashly. Forgive me, I pray you, and remove your curse, so that I may not become blind."

Uttanka's heart softened towards the King. "My curse must fall on you," he said. "You will become blind, but your sight will soon return. Be merciful also to me and take from me your curse so that I may one day have children," But King Paushya was angry with Uttanka because he had taken the earrings of his queen. "No, Uttanka," he answered scornfully. "It is well for a Brahman to call down curses and then turn them to nothing. For a Brahman's heart is as soft as butter even though his words are hard. But a Kshatrya's heart is as hard as steel even though his words tare soft. I shall not therefore free you from my curse and it will remain with you." Then Uttanka said, "Your curse, O King, will not remain with me. You cursed me because I said that the food set before me was unclean. But the food *was* unclean and my words were true. Therefore it was your curse that was false and it cannot do me any harm."

With anger in his heart Uttanka left King Paushya's palace and began his journey back to the rishi Veda's hermitage. As he walked, he saw a naked beggar man flitting through the scrub. But he never could see him clearly because, whenever he glanced towards him, the beggar man vanished. After some time Uttanka grew thirsty, and paying little heed to the beggar man,

looked about him for water. As he looked about him, the beggar man crept nearer and nearer. At last Uttanka saw in the distance a beautiful pool of water. At first he thought it was a mirage, but when he came closer to it he saw that it was a real pool and that a beautiful fresh breeze blew over it and rippled its surface. With a cry of joy Uttanka ran towards it. As he ran, the beggar man ran close behind him, and when Uttanka put on the ground the queen's earrings that he might more easily drink the water, the beggar man deftly picked them up and ran away. Uttanka did not at first notice the theft. But after he had drunk his fill and had bathed his face and hands he looked round and saw the beggar man running away as fast as he could with the queen's priceless earrings in his hand. Uttanka sprang to his feet and after a long chase caught up the beggar man and seized him. At the same moment the beggar man, who was really Takshaka, a prince of the snake people, once more assumed the form of a mighty snake, and with a noise that was half a hiss and half a derisive laugh vanished into a snake burrow that opened close to Uttanka's feet.

The boy now grieved that he had not heeded the queen's warning. "The beggar man," he murmured sadly to himself, "must be Prince Takshaka." He then tried to force his way through the hole by which the snake prince had gone. But his shoulders stuck in the entrance. Next he strove to widen it with a stick, but the earth fell in and blocked the hole altogether. Then he sat down by the hole and wept bitterly. The god Indra from Amravati saw the Brahman boy's grief, and seizing a thunderbolt said to it, "Go and help Uttanka." Straightway the thunderbolt left the god Indra's hand

and entered the stick with which Uttanka had been vainly trying to widen the hole.

After the boy had mastered his grief, he again took up his stick and tried to open up the burrow. This time, because of Indra's thunderbolt inside the stick, the earth heaped itself readily on both sides and no longer fell in. Soon Uttanka had made a passage wide enough for him to enter. He crawled through it until he found himself in a wide, open plain covered with the palaces, houses and castles of the snake people. Uttanka walked into the snake people's city, and to win their favour began to sing their praises. He sang of their sinuous beauty, the might of Prince Takshaka's younger brother, Prince Srutasena. He then bowed to the various palaces in turn. But his flattery had no effect and his song died on his lips. For Prince Takshaka did not come out to give him back his earrings.

Just then Uttanka looked round. Suddenly he saw close to him two maidens working at a loom and weaving a cloth with black and white threads. Further away he saw six boys turning a wheel with twelve spokes. Beyond them again he saw a man standing near a horse. Uttanka, hoping to win the favour of these newcomers, began a song in praise of them. And he especially praised the man with the horse. At last the man said, "Fair youth, your song is pleasing: what good can I do to you?"

"Great lord," said Uttanka, bowing humbly before him. "the snake prince Takshaka has done me a great wrong. He has robbed me of my earrings. The boon, therefore, that I ask of you is that he and all his people shall be humbled before me."

"If that is your wish," said the man, "it is easily

done. Blow upon my horse."

Uttanka blew upon the horse and instantly flames leapt out from its eyes and mouth and nose, and shot outwards until they seized upon the city of the snake people. In a few moments half of the great city was in ashes and the flames were rapidly devouring the other half. Prince Takshaka, fearing for his life and for the lives of the snake people, made his way to where Uttanka and the man stood. " O Brahman boy," he said, "I have wronged you. I own my fault; therefore pardon me. Here are your earrings. Take them back, and spare our city." Uttanka took back the earrings of the queen and placed them for safety in his garment. Instantly the flames died down and the city of the snake people was saved from total destruction.

Uttanka was overjoyed that he should have recovered the fee due to his teacher's wife. But suddenly he remembered that the days allotted to him had all but passed and that he could not return in time for his preceptress to wear the earrings when she feasted the Brahmans. He thought and thought but could discover no way to reach his hermitage before sunset. As he meditated, he heard the man with the horse say to him, "Mount my horse; it will take you at once to Veda's dwelling." Uttanka mounted the horse. It rose in the air with incredible swiftness, and in a few moments he found himself in front of Veda's hermitage. Veda's wife was bathing and dressing her hair in order that she might fitly feast the Brahmans. " Uttanka," she said to herself, " has failed to bring me the earrings for which I asked. When the sun sets I shall curse him." As she made this resolve Uttanka entered the house. His teacher's wife dressed herself, and Uttanka, saluting her humbly,

gave her the earrings of King Paushya's queen.

Veda's wife thanked him; and Veda said, "Uttanka, my son, tell me how it was that you delayed so long." Uttanka answered, "O my master, Takshaka the snake prince stole my earrings, and to recover them I had to follow him into the city of the snake people." And Uttanka told Veda all that had befallen him. Then continuing he said, "Reverend sage, tell me who were the maidens who were weaving with white and black threads, and what was the wheel with the twelve spokes that six boys were turning. Who was the giant on the bull, and who was the man who gave me the wondrous horse?"

"The maidens," replied Veda, "who were weaving white and black threads were Day and Night. The wheel with the twelve spokes was the year with its twelve months. The six boys who were turning it were the six season's.[1] The giant who rode the bull was Indra, and the bull was his mighty elephant Airavat. The food that he gave you was ambrosia, and because you ate it you passed without harm through the land of the snake people. The man who aided you to burn their city was Parjanya the god of rain, and the horse that he gave you to ride was Agni the god of fire. Truly, my son, the Immortals, because they love me, shewed you great kindness. Without their help you could never have won for my wife the earrings of King Paushya's queen."

So saying, Veda drew Uttanka towards him and embraced him. "Uttanka my son," he said, "the days of your pupilage are over. Go therefore where you will." Uttanka saluted Veda and his wife and left their

1 The Indian year has six seasons.

hermitage. With his heart burning with hatred against Prince Takshaka he made his way to the court of King Janamejaya the Bharata, who ruled in Hastinapura.

KING JANAMEJAYA'S SNAKE SACRIFICE

I

ONCE there lived in India a great king named Prajapati. He had two beautiful daughters, both of whom he gave in marriage to a king no less great than himself, Kashyapa by name. And Kashyapa cherished them both and loved them dearly. One day he said to them, "O my Queens, ask each of you a boon and it shall be granted to you." Queen Kadru, who was the elder, answered first: "My lord King, the boon that I would ask is this; let me be the mother of a thousand snakes." King Kashyapa said, "Queen Kadru, the boon is granted to you." Then he turned to Queen Vinata. "My lord King," said the younger queen, "grant that I become the mother of two sons who shall be equal in strength to the thousand snakes born of my sister." King Kashyapa said, "Queen Vinata, the boon is granted to you."

In due course Queen Kadru gave birth to a thousand eggs, and from them issued a thousand snakes. Queen Vinata gave birth to two eggs. But from Queen Vinata's eggs nothing came forth. At last Vinata, ashamed that Kadru should have borne a thousand sons and that she herself remained without offspring, broke open one of the eggs. At once there rose a strange shape from the broken egg. Its head and upper part had the form of a

man. But its limbs were unformed because its mother had broken open the egg. "My mother," spake the shape, "because you were jealous of Queen Kadru and would not wait until my body had become perfect, I curse you. And my curse is that you shall become the slave of the very queen Kadru of whom you were jealous. But if you wait for five thousand years my brother will come from the other egg and he will rescue you from slavery." With these words the shape rose into the air and disappeared from sight.

Queen Vinata paid heed to the words of her son, whom she called Aruna because his body was red, and carefully kept the second egg. But because her one son had left her, her jealousy of Queen Kadru grew daily. One day Queen Kadru asked Queen Vinata the colour of Uchaisrava, the divine horse which had come out of the ocean when the gods and demons churned it. Queen Vinata answered sharply, "The colour of Uchaisrava is white. If you think otherwise, my sister, let us lay a wager." Queen Kadru was angered at her sister's answer and said, "No, Uchaisrava has a white body but a black tail. If you think otherwise, let our wager be this. She whose words shall prove false shall become the slave of the other." Queen Vinata consented, and the sisters agreed that next morning they would cross the ocean and see whether the tail of Uchaisrava was white or black.

That evening, however, Queen Kadru, fearing that she had been in error, sent for her thousand snake sons and bade them fasten themselves to Uchaisrava's tail, so that it might seem black, whether really black or not. The snakes refused. Queen Kadru in a passion cursed them, saying, "My sons, King Janamejaya, the Bharata,

will hold a great snake sacrifice and will consume you all with fire." Then she left them, and next morning set forth with Queen Vinata to the dwelling-place of Uchaisrava. Together they crossed the ocean and journeyed to the uttermost ends of the earth. Now after Queen Kadru had cursed her thousand sons, they took counsel together. Fearing her curse they resolved to fasten themselves to Uchaisrava's tail. "If we do her bidding," they said, "our mother may pardon us and take the curse from us. But if we are still disobedient, her curse will fall on us and we shall be burnt in the sacrifice of King Janamejaya, the Bharata. Therefore with all speed they hastened to the dwelling of Uchaisrava and fastened themselves to his tail before the two queens had ended their journey. Kadru and Vinata together entered Uchaisrava's palace, and at the same moment they saw that its tail was black. Queen Kadru turned to Queen Vinata and said, "My sister, you have lost your wager. You and your children after you will be the slaves of myself and my thousand snake sons." And from that day Queen Vinata served her sister as a bond-woman.

Many hundred years after the two queens had returned homewards, the second egg which Queen Vinata had borne opened, and from it came a mighty bird a thousand times larger than the largest elephant. To him Queen Vinata gave the name of Garuda. But because he had been born in slavery, he too became a slave, and Queen Kadru and her snake sons made him bear them about, at their will, from one spot to another. One day Garuda, weary of toil, said, "O my mother, why must I do the bidding of the snake people?" "My son," answered Queen Vinata sadly, "I made a foolish

wager and Queen Kadru tricked me. So I became her slave, and as you were born in slavery, you too are her slave and must do her bidding and that of her thousand sons." Garuda pondered over what his mother had said, and then, going to the snakes, his cousins, said, "O my cousins, I am your slave. But grant me this boon, I pray you. Tell me what great work I may do to win my freedom and that of my mother."

The snakes answered him with one voice saying "O Garuda, bring us the ambrosia which the gods won from the sea when they churned the ocean. They have given it to Indra to keep. Take it from him and bring it here, and we will set you and your mother free."

Garuda went back to his mother and told her what his cousins the snakes had said. "My mother," he continued, "I would start at once to fetch the ambrosia but I fear that without food I shall die of hunger on the way." Queen Vinata answered, "My son Garuda, before you ascend to heaven you will pass over the uttermost ends of the earth. There live the Nishada people. Rest in their country and devour them. Thus you will be able to go to your journey's end and win the ambrosia. But be careful lest by chance you eat a Brahman. For if you swallow one you will be unable to digest him, and your stomach will pain you as if you had swallowed a fish-hook or burning charcoal." With these words Queen Vinata blessed her son; and flapping his mighty wings he rose and soon vanished in the distant sky.

When he came to the ends of the earth he alighted in the country of the Nishadas. And opening his mouth he sucked into it all those who lived there. To quench his thirst he drank up the rivers that watered the land.

But unhappily he neglected the words of his mother and sucked into his mouth a Brahman who had married a woman of the Nishada people. Instantly his stomach began to pain him, as if he had swallowed a fish-hook or a burning charcoal. Garuda remembered Queen Vinata's words and said, "O Brahman, come back through my mouth, for I had no wish to kill you." "No," said the Brahman, "I cannot come back alone. I must take with me my wife, who is a Nishada woman." Garuda agreed; the Brahman and his wife walked out of the great bird's mouth, and at once Garuda's pain abated.

Garuda, who had suffered greatly, rested from his journey, and then returning home sought out his father Kashyapa. Garuda told his father what had befallen him. "O father," he continued, "now that I have eaten the Nishada people and drunk up their rivers, how shall I feed myself on my journey to win the ambrosia?" "Garuda, my son," replied King Kashyapa, "once there lived two brothers named Vivavasu and Supratika. They had great wealth, and when Supratika grew to manhood, he wished to divide it. 'Give me my share,' he said, 'O my brother, of our wealth.' 'No, my brother,' answered Vivavasu. 'The wise never divide wealth. For brothers who do so no longer remain united but live separately and quarrel with one another.' But Supratika still pressed him for his share, until Vivavasu's anger blazed out. 'You make light of my words, Supratika,' he said; 'therefore become an elephant'. Supratika, feeling himself change into an elephant, grew angry also and cursed his brother, saying, 'Become in your turn a tortoise'. And ever since that day the two brothers, in the shapes of an elephant and a tortoise, live by a great lake and

fight with each other incessantly. Go therefore, my son, and eat their flesh and drink the waters of the lake; so you will be able to journey to Amravati and win from Indra the golden jar of ambrosia. For the gods placed it in his keeping from the day that Dhanwantari brought it up from the depths of the churned ocean." With these words King Kashyapa blessed Garuda. And the great bird rising high into the air soon vanished from his father's sight.

As Garuda flew to the ends of the earth, he heard a great noise and looking down saw a wide stretch of water. By its banks an elephant and a tortoise were roaring as they fought each other. Garuda swooped swiftly down and seizing the elephant and tortoise in his talons, alighted on a mountain. There he devoured their flesh, and after quenching his thirst in the waters of the lake, flew strongly towards Amravati, the god Indra's heaven.

Now the god Indra had built many strong works and defences to guard the ambrosia jar. And he had posted Vayu the wind god to blow dust into the eyes of any coming foeman. Inside the outer works he had built a great circle of fire, which died down neither by night nor by day. Within the circle of fire he had built a great wheel with edged spokes, which turned without stopping. And inside the wheel were two poisonous snakes, which never slept, but day and night watched the sky for the coming of enemies. For some days past meteors had been racing through the skies, lightning had flashed from the cloudless blue heaven and bloody rain had fallen in torrents upon Amravati. Because of these portents the god Indra and his guards were keeping a close watch. But their vigilance availed them

nothing.

Suddenly Garuda appeared in the sky, refreshed by the meat of the tortoise and the elephant. With his huge claws he kicked down the breastworks which Indra had built, with his wings he drove back the dust which the wind god Vayu blew in his face, and, scattering in every direction Indra and his guards, he drew near to the circle of fire. This he could not blow out with his wings, but going back to earth he sucked up in his throat the waters of a great river, and discharged them into the fire, so that it soon became a mass of smouldering embers. Garuda passed beyond it to the revolving wheel. There he changed himself into a tiny insect, and passing through the spokes stood near to the snakes. At once he resumed his old form and tore them to pieces with his beak and talons. Then seizing the ambrosia jar he kicked down the stand upon which the wheel revolved. And soaring into the air he was about to fly back to his cousins the snake people. But the god Vishnu came across the great bird's path. "O Garuda," he said; "I have seen your deeds and I would give you a boon." "Grant me, great god, this boon," said Garuda, "let me drink of the ambrosia so that I may become free from sickness, pain and death." Vishnu gave Garuda the boon, and after drinking a draught of the ambrosia he went on his way towards the earth. But as Garuda went, Indra met him. "Mighty Garuda," he said, "let there be friendship between us. And do not bear away the ambrosia jar. For you have drunk of it and have become immortal as the gods are. If you give it to the snake people, they, too, will become immortal and will wage war upon us." "Lord Indra," said Garuda, "I accept gladly your friendship. But I must

bear the ambrosia jar to earth and give it to my cousins the snake people. Otherwise they will not set me and my mother free. But do you, Lord Indra, take the ambrosia jar away from them before they have had time to drink of it." To this Indra consented. And Garuda, flying swiftly to earth, entered the presence of Queen Vinata. "My mother," he said, "I have brought the ambrosia jar, let us call my cousins the snake people so that they may set us free." Queen Vinata was overjoyed. And Garuda sent for the snake people and placed before them the ambrosia jar; and he said to them. "My cousins, I have brought the ambrosia jar and I have placed it before you; therefore, as you promised, set me and my mother free from slavery." The snakes with one accord consented and, leaving the ambrosia jar, went to bathe in a neighbouring stream to purify themselves before drinking the sacred liquid. When they had left the god Indra swooped down like an eagle from the heavens and, seizing the ambrosia jar, bore it back with him to Amravati. But before he went he laid on the ground cups made of sharp-edged Kusha grass. When the snakes came back from bathing they searched in vain for the jar of ambrosia. Seeing the Kusha cups they thought that ambrosia had been poured into them. They licked the cups, but the sharp edges of the grass slit their tongues down to the roots, so that ever since that time the snake people have had forked tongues.

And in great pain and grief the sons of Queen Kadru made their way back to their dwelling places under the earth.

II

AFTER the snake people had lost the ambrosia jar

they sat in council together. For they had set free Queen Vinata and her son Garuda without receiving their price, and Queen Kadru had never taken from them her fearful curse that they would all be consumed in the snake sacrifice of king Janamejaya the Bharata. Some snakes said, "Let us bite all men and beasts to death" other snakes said, "Let us hinder the worship of the gods so that they may be forced to stay our mother's curse"; yet other snakes said, "Let us find king Janamejaya the Bharata and kill him." But Vasuki, the chief of the snake people, said sadly, "My brothers, this will in no way help us, for no one can escape a mother's curse." Then a serpent named Elapatra, spoke, "O Vasuki," he said, "when our mother Queen Kadru cursed us, I lay trembling on her lap and then I heard the Immortals speaking with Brahmadeva the father of them all. The Immortals asked Brahmadeva why he allowed Queen Kadru to curse her sons. Brahmadeva answered, 'The snake people have multiplied exceedingly and they will destroy the world if they themselves are not destroyed. Many of them will therefore be consumed in the fire of Janamejaya's sacrifice. But they will not all perish. For a rishi named Jaratkaru will wed Jaratkaru the sister of Vasuki the snake king. She will bear her husband a son named Astika, who will save the snake people from entire destruction."

When king Vasuki heard the words of the snake Elapatra he dismissed his brothers. And from that day he devoted himself to the service of his sister Jaratkaru in order that she might find favour in the eyes of the great rishi and so save the snake people from entire destruction.

But the rishi Jaratkaru had by his asceticism over-

come all earthly desires. And he journeyed from shrine to shrine, with never a thought of marriage. One day, as the great Sage was walking abroad, he passed a deep pit. Looking into it he saw several men hanging head downwards and fastened by a single cord to the bough of a tree. Jaratkaru paused in wonder and said, "Strange Sirs, who are you and why do you hang thus head downwards? If you wish to escape from your plight I can save you. For I have won great powers by the mortifications that I have willingly endured."

"No, my son" answered one of the strange men "your powers cannot help us. We too were great rishis and also won great powers by our asceticism. For we who hang head downwards are your ancestors. The single cord which supports us is your life, O Jaratkaru. Every day a rat comes and nibbles at the cord. And the rat is Time, which is eating away your life; and when Time has eaten it, we shall all fall headlong into Hell, which lies at the bottom of this pit. There is but one way in which you can save us. Marry a wife and beget a son and he will be a new cord to save us from Hell."

Jaratkaru was greatly grieved, for he had no wish to wed a wife. Yet he would not allow his ancestors to fall headlong into Hell. So he said, "O my ancestors, I am willing to marry, but the bride whom I shall choose must be named Jaratkaru as I am. She must bestow herself on me as a gift and must cost me nothing. If I do not find such a wife I shall not marry." With these words Jaratkaru left his ancestors and wandered over the world seeking a bride named Jaratkaru, who would come to him free and would cost him nothing. But nowhere could be find such a bride. At last he

went into the heart of the forest and cried aloud:

"All creatures living in the world, listen to my words. I roam over the earth looking for a bride so that I may beget a son and save my ancestors. But she must be named Jaratkaru, and she must come to me as a gift, and I will not bear the cost of her maintenance. Therefore if any of you have such a daughter, give her to me in marriage.

Now the snake king Vasuki had sent snakes to watch the rishi Jaratkaru and to follow him wherever he went. When they heard him cry aloud in this manner they hastened to tell Vasuki. And Vasuki on hearing them adorned his sister with jewels, and taking her by the hand led her before the great rishi and offered her to him as a gift. But the rishi would not take the gift until Vasuki had sworn to him that her name was Jaratkaru, and that Vasuki would bear the cost of her maintenance. Then the rishi accepted her as his bride, but warned her that if ever she did anything that displeased him, that moment he would leave her. The maiden vowed that she would always please him and for some months she did nothing to rouse her husband's anger. One evening the rishi placed his head upon his wife's lap and soon fell fast asleep. But she saw with dismay that the sun was sinking, and she knew that if the rishi did not wake he would miss his evening prayer and thus lose a portion of his virtue. On the other hand she guessed that if she awoke her husband he would be displeased with her, and would cast her from him. Nevertheless, after thinking deeply, she resolved rather to endure her husband's anger than to cause him to lose his virtue. So she spoke to her husband saying, "Great lord, arise, for the sun is setting." The rishi awoke, but

on hearing her words grew so angry that his lips quivered. " Snake woman," be cried, " you have sorely displeased me. Do you not know that while I sleep the sun has no power to set? Go back therefore to your brother's house and vex me no more." The snake princess strove in vain to soothe the anger of the rishi. But it could not be appeased and, leaving her, he went away to the forest and became once more an anchorite.

The snake princess went sadly back to the palace of her brother Vasuki the snake king. There she bore to her husband a son called Astika. And King Vasuki gave Astika, when he grew to be a youth, the wisest teachers in all India. So that the fame of Astika's virtues and of his learning spread to the ends of the earth.

III.

Now when King Yudhisthira and his brothers [1] and their queen, Draupadi, had left Hastinapura and set out for the Lord Indra's heaven, they had placed on the throne of the Bharatas Parikshit the son of Abhimanyu, the son of Arjuna the archer. And Parikshit's fame spread all over India. For he was a wise and mighty prince and for nearly sixty years he ruled justly upon the throne of Hastinapura. One day when he was over sixty years of age he went hunting in the forest. While he hunted, he wounded a stag with an arrow, and as his horse was weary he left it and followed the stag on foot. But the stag fled and he lost all trace of it. Hungry and tired, King Parikshit wandered through the forest until at last he came to the hermitage of the rishi Samika. " O Brahman," said the King, " I am

1 For the story of Yudhisthira and his brothers see my book " The Indian Heroes." (Oxford University Press.)

King Parikshit and the Rishi.

King Parikshit the son of Abhimanyu the son of Arjuna the Bharata. I am looking for a deer that I have wounded. Tell me, reverend Sir, if it has passed this way." But the rishi Samika had taken a vow of silence and, although the king repeated his question, the rishi would not answer him. King Parikshit grew angry and picking up a dead snake with his bow placed it in derision round Samika's neck. The rishi said nothing and King Parikshit, repenting of his deed, went back to his own city. After some days Samika's son Sringi returned to the hermitage and, seeing a dead snake on his father's shoulders, learnt from a friend named Krishna the outrage that Parikshit had done to Samika. Then Sringi, who also was a great rishi, grew angry with King Parikshit and cursed him saying, "O wicked king, because you insulted my father, Takshaka the snake prince will bite and kill you within seven days." Sringi's father Samika rebuked his son for the curse and bade him take it back. But Sringi would not listen to his father nor relent. So Samika sent word by a disciple named Gaurmukha to King Parikshit warning him of Sringi's curse. And King Parikshit, fearing for his life, caused a round stone pillar to be placed in the ground and on the pillar he built a palace. In the palace there were no windows and only one door. It closed so tightly that the smallest insect could not enter. And King Parikshit went into the palace so that he might pass in safety the seven days allotted to him by Sringi's curse.

On the seventh day Takshaka the snake prince left his palace under the earth to kill King Parikshit and thus fulfil the rishi Sringi's curse. Now about the same time a certain Brahman named Kashyapa, who was

skilled above all men in curing snake-bites, resolved to go to Hastinapura and to earn great wealth by curing King Parikshit after Prince Takshaka had bitten him. As Kashyapa journeyed Prince Takshaka saw him ; and, guessing what his purpose was, Prince Takshaka disguised himself as a Brahman and going up to Kashyapa said, "Where are you going ? tell me, I pray you." "Good Sir," said Kashyapa, "I am going to Hastinapura to cure King Parikshit after he has been bitten by Prince Takshaka." "Sir," said the snake prince, "I am prince Takshaka. I wish to test your power. Let me see, if you can cure this tree after I have bitten it." As the snake prince spoke he drove his fangs deep into a great banian tree that stood close to him. And such was the fearful force of the poison that in a few moments nothing remained of the great tree but a heap of ashes. Kashyapa then went up to the ashes and by his magic recreated first the leaves, then the twigs, then the branches and the trunk, and lastly the roots, so that the great tree stood just as it had stood before Prince Takshaka had bitten it. The snake prince marvelled at the magic of Kashyapa and feared that he would save King Parikshit if suffered to go to Hastinapura. "Sir," said Prince Takshaka, "your power is great indeed. But if I give you more wealth than all that King Parikshit possesses will you not leave him to his fate and return home ? For a Brahman's curse is upon him. And even your magic may fail to save him. And if you were to fail, the shame of your failure would resound through the three worlds." "Fair snake prince" answered Kashyapa, "I am going to Hastinapura only for gain. Give me what you offer me and I shall return home." Prince Takshaka gladly gave Kashyapa more

wealth than all the treasures of King Parikshit. Kashyapa turned homewards and the snake prince journeyed towards Hastinapura. But when he drew near to Parikshit's palace he saw that it was useless openly to seek an entry, so close was the guard set round the pillar and so tightly was its single door fastened. Calling to the snakes who were his attendants he turned them into Brahmans. And giving them baskets of fruits and flowers bade them go the palace as holy men who wished to make offerings to King Parikshit the Bharata. When they had reached the palace the guards permitted them as holy men to enter it and offer the king their basket of fruits and flowers. He graciously accepted the offering. But inside one of the fruits Prince Takshaka lay hidden in the form of a tiny insect. And when the king began to eat the fruits, he chose first the very one in which the snake prince lay concealed. As the king ate he saw the tiny insect. Then he said to his ministers. "This is the seventh day and it is near sunset. I no longer fear the poison of Prince Takshaka. But I repent of the wrong that I did to the rishi Samika. So to atone for my sin I shall let this tiny insect bite me." With these words he placed the tiny insect on his forehead. With a fearful roar prince Takshaka re-assumed his proper shape and fastening his mighty coils round king Parikshit drove his fangs in the kings face so that he died instantly. And such was the terrible strength of the poison that it passed through the king's body and entering the floor of the palace consumed it, as if it had been destroyed by fire. Many of the king's attendants perished, but others fled. And as they fled they saw the giant form of prince Takshaka coursing through the sky, as he went swiftly from Hastinapura.

After the Brahman priests had performed the last rites of the dead king, the ministers and the citizens of Hastinapura gathered together and placed on the vacant throne Parikshit's son Janamejaya the Bharata although he was then but a boy. For although young he was wise and learned beyond his years. And all knew that he would rule well and justly over the empire of the Bharatas.

IV

As the years passed by the King, Janamejaya the Bharata, grew in stature and in wisdom. One day he called round him his ministers and bade them tell him the whole story of the death of his father King Parikshit. Now it so happened that just before Prince Takshaka spoke with the Brahman Kashyapa, a certain wood cutter had climbed into the banian tree in order to gather fuel. When the snake prince bit the tree, he perished with it. But when Kashyapa revived the tree, he brought back to life the wood cutter also. And after Prince Takshaka had killed King Parikshit, the wood cutter went to his ministers and told them all that he had seen and heard. Thus the ministers were able to relate the full tale of King Parikshit's death. After they had ended it, they blamed greatly the rishi Sringi. But King Janamejaya blamed Prince Takshaka the snake prince more. For, so the King said, if Prince Takshaka had not bribed Kashyapa to depart King Parikshit would have lived. And in this view Uttanka, the pupil of the rishi Veda, who had lately come to dwell at Hastinapura supported Janamejaya. For Uttanka hated Prince Takshaka because he had tried to steal from him the earrings of King Paushya's queen.

Many times King Janamejaya exclaimed aloud "I

must avenge my father's death". Then he turned to his ministers and said "Good sirs, tell me how I may consume with fire Takshaka the snake prince as he consumed King Parikshit my father with his poison." The ministers answered, "O my King, from our ancient books it is laid down how to hold a snake sacrifice. And by holding such a sacrifice you will surely consume Prince Takshaka and the snake people, just as Prince Takshaka consumed King Parikshit with his poison." On hearing this answer King Janamejaya ordered that the Brahmans of the Kingdom should hold a snake sacrifice according to the rites written in the ancient books. The Brahmans, so ordered, measured out a vast piece of land and on it they reared a mighty sacrificial platform. When the appointed day broke, the Brahmans seated themselves upon the platform, and King Janamejaya placed near them a great store of wealth which should be their reward.

The Brahmans robed themselves in black garments and kindled a fire. When the fire had begun to burn brightly the Brahmans poured ghee on the flames until the flames turned to smoke and into the smoke they muttered strange spells. And the spells had power over the snake people and their hearts turned to water within them. Then the Brahmans poured more ghee on the flames and called on the chiefs and princes of the snake people by their names. And the spells of the Brahmans began to draw the snake people towards the fire. And although the chiefs and princes among the snake people hid themselves in the lakes and rivers and seas and in their agony coiled themselves round trees and stones and mountain tops, yet the spells drew them one by one towards the fire. And forced by the spells they one

after the other fell into the fire, which instantly consumed them.

But Prince Takshaka fled in fear to the throne of the god Indra and confessed his fault to him. The god Indra pardoned him and said, "Prince Takshaka, stay here and you need fear nothing." And Prince Takshaka rejoiced greatly and hid himself under Indra's throne.

Now the spells of the Brahmans increased in power and the snakes fell into the fire in ever greater numbers, until Vasuki their king feared that all his people would perish. Then he remembered the promise of the god Brahmadeva that Astika the son of the rishi Jaratkaru and of King Vasuki's sister would save the snake people from entire destruction. So King Vasuki went to his sister Jaratkaru and bade her send her son Astika to save the snake people. Astika at his mother's bidding went to Hastinapura and approached the sacrificial fire. There he spoke so nobly the praises of King Janamejaya the Bharata, and of the mighty Brahmans who sat round the fire, that the heart of King Janamejaya warmed towards him. "Give me leave, great sages," said the King, "to grant this Brahman a boon, for his words are wise and I am pleased with him." But Souti the chief of the Brahmans said, "O King, grant him no boon until we have consumed in the fire Prince Takshaka your enemy." "Where is Prince Takshaka?" asked the Bharata King. "He is hiding in Amravati," answered Souti, "under the god Indra's throne, and Indra has promised him that he will save him." "If that be so," said King Janamejaya, "with your spells draw into the fire not Prince Takshaka only but the god Indra and all Amravati." Then the Brahmans muttered ever fiercer spells and poured more ghee into the sacrificial fire until

they began to draw into the fire not only the snake prince but the god Indra and all Amravati. Filled with fear Indra cast from him Prince Takshaka, and the snake prince, lying across the sky, was slowly drawn to the fire by the spells of the Brahmans. Then Souti said to Janamejaya, " Nothing now can save Prince Takshaka, so grant Astika whatever boon he asks." On hearing these words, the king turned to Astika and said, " Ask what you will and I shall grant it. "

Prince Takshaka was falling with increasing speed from the sky towards the fire when Astika cried aloud, " Stay, stay, stay." And the words of Astika overcame the spells of the Brahmans and the vast length of the snake prince lay motionless, suspended in the heavens. Then Astika said to King Janamejaya, "O Bharata King, you have granted me a boon and the boon that I would have is this. Spare the lives of Prince Takshaka and of all those among the snake people who have not yet been consumed." King Janamejaya in vain sought by offering Astika herds of cattle and a great treasure of gold and silver to turn him from his purpose. But Astika answered, " King Janamejaya, you are an Aryan king and you cannot go back on your promise. You have promised me a boon. Therefore give me the lives of Prince Takshaka and those among the snake people who are still alive." At last the Brahmans, over whose spells the words of Astika had power, also pressed King Janamejaya to grant him this boon. So the king bade the sacrifice be abandoned, and dividing the treasure among the Brahmans, spoke graciously to Astika and then drove in his chariot to his city Hastinapura. But Astika went to King Vasuki his uncle and Jaratkaru his mother, and told them how he had stopped the sacrifice. King Vasuki

and Jaratkaru and all the snake people were overjoyed. They said with one voice to Astika, "Ask of us a boon and it shall be granted to you." Astika answered, "O King Vasuki and snake people, grant me this boon, namely that all men who read this tale shall be safe from your poisonous bites." And with one voice the king and the snake people cried in answer, "We grant you the boon, O Astika. And if in days to come any man shall say aloud the name of Astika and shall by your name call on any snake not to bite him, he shall be safe from the peril of our poison. And if any snake, disregarding our promise, shall bite any man he shall have his head cut into a hundred pieces." With these words King Vasuki and the snake people departed to their homes under the earth. And the rishi Astika went to live happily with his mother Jaratkaru the sister of King Vasuki.[1]

But it will be asked what befell Aruna the other son of Queen Vinata. He became charioteer of the Sun and it happened in this way. After the Sun had seen Rahu drink the ambrosia, and had told Vishnu, Rahu was for ever attempting to devour him and at last the Sun-god grew angry that he alone among the Immortals should suffer and he resolved to destroy the world and the heaven above it and the sea beneath. He went in his chariot to the western mountains and resting it on the loftiest peak began to spread his rays over all the earth. The pools and lakes dried up, the rivers ceased to flow, the sea boiled and bubbled with the heat and the fishes died within its teeming depths. At last the sages of India went to the throne of Brahmadeva and begged him

1 It is still the practice of Indians, when passing through grass or jungle inhabited by snakes to say aloud the name of "Astika."

to stay the anger of the Sun, otherwise the world and all that lived in it would die before the day was over. Brahmadeva called Garuda to him and bade him seek his brother Aruna. Garuda sought Aruna and found him still rising through the air just as he had risen out of Queen Vinata's sight. At Brahmadeva's bidding Garuda took his brother with him to the western mountains, and he made Aruna sit in the front part of the chariot and drive the six horses of the Sun-god. Aruna did so and the rays of the Sun could no longer burn the earth, for their fierce heat was fended off by the great body of Aruna. When he found that he could no longer carry out his resolve, the Sun-god's anger abated. He welcomed Aruna and bade him always be his charioteer. And Aruna drives the six horses of the Sun-god to this day.

VRIGU AND AGNI

Once upon a time in the days when the Bharata princes ruled over India there lived a mighty rishi named Vrigu. And his wisdom and powers were such that men said that the god Brahmadeva had created him out of the fire, when Varuna the sea god made a great sacrifice. At this same time, there lived a most beautiful maiden named Puloma, the fame of whose loveliness spread throughout the whole empire of the Bharatas. When she grew to full womanhood her father offered her in marriage to Vrigu the rishi. Vrigu accepted her hand. And thus the wisest and the loveliest in all the land were united in wedlock.

They lived together happily and after several months

Puloma was about to bear her lord a son. But before the child's birth the great sage went to bathe in a holy river. In his absence there came to his hermitage a demon king named Paulama. When Puloma was quite a child her father had promised her hand to the demon king. But afterwards, hearing the fame of the rishi Vrigu, he broke his promise and gave her in marriage to the great sage. Paulama in vain urged that he was betrothed to Puloma. But her father treated him with scorn. At last the demon king went away in anger, vowing that his disgrace would one day be avenged. Day after day he hid himself near Vrigu's hermitage, until at last, seeing that Vrigu had gone to a distant river, the demon king boldly entered the hermitage and asked Puloma to give him food. The rishi's beautiful wife suspected no evil and welcoming the betrothed of her childhood, offered him for food the fruits of the forest. But as Paulama ate, his longing for Puloma grew and so also grew his hatred for Vrigu. "I shall carry her off," he muttered to himself, "and thus I shall avenge my dishonour and win for myself the wife whom Vrigu tore away from my arms." But before he did so, he entered an inner room where a sacred fire burnt always day and night. "O fire god Agni," he said, "the lady Puloma was once my affianced bride. Vrigu took her from me by trickery. But she was given to me first, therefore tell me, I pray you, whether she is not now my lawful wife." Agni at first did not answer. He would gladly have said that Paulama had a just claim. But he feared that if he spoke thus, Vrigu's curse would fall upon and destroy him. So after thinking deeply he said, "O demon king, it is true that Puloma was your affianced bride, but she never became your wife. She went

through the marriage ceremony with the rishi Vrigu. She is therefore Vrigu's wife and not yours."

The demon king grew angry and paying no heed to the words of Agni, took the shape of a boar, and throwing Puloma across his back galloped at full speed through the forest. As he galloped he met the rishi Vrigu, who was returning from the sacred river where he had gone to bathe. When the great sage saw that the wild boar carried on his back his beautiful bride he cursed the boar as he ran. Instantly the boar was consumed and became a heap of ashes. Puloma fell to the ground and lay unconscious.

When Puloma had recovered from the fall Vrigu asked her who had pointed out their hermitage to the demon king Paulama, so that he might curse him. "It was Agni," answered Puloma weeping, for she thought that Agni had aided Paulama. Then Vrigu's wrath blazed up like a forest fire and he cursed Agni saying, "Henceforth everything that you touch will be consumed."

Agni was very angry at the curse for he had in no way merited it. And he would have cursed Vrigu in turn, had Vrigu not been one of the race of the Brahmans whom he respected. So Agni went far away into a distant cave and hid himself. And because mankind had no longer any fire they could no longer offer sacrifices to the gods, nor did the gods receive any honour from them. At last in great distress the rishis and the Immortals met. "O Immortals" said the rishis, "we can no longer serve you, owing to the flight of Agni. Let us therefore pray to the god Brahmadeva and perhaps he may help us." Together, therefore, the rishis and the Immortals went to the throne of the god Brahmadeva and told him how Vrigu had cursed Agni the

fire god, and how in his wrath Agni had hidden himself from mankind.

On hearing their tale, the god Brahmadeva sent a messenger to call Agni the fire god to him. And Agni came into his presence and told Brahmadeva how Vrigu had cursed him without reason. But Brahmadeva answered Agni with soothing words. "The curse of Vrigu," said Brahmadeva, "cannot be removed. But I shall turn his curse into a blessing. Henceforth, Agni, all that is vile you will consume with your flames. But all that is pure will remain. Thus all that passes through fire will be purified." And Agni hearing these words was comforted. He no longer hid himself in a distant cave, but lived in his former dwelling. And mankind used Agni as of old in their sacrifices. The Immortals were happy because of the honour which they received and the rishis because they once again could offer sacrifices. And because of the happiness of the Immortals and the power of the rishis mankind grew daily happier. And in after years they spoke of this time as the golden age.

RURU AND PRAMADVARA

Now Vrigu's son Chyavana had a son named Sukanya and Sukanya begat in turn Pramati, and Pramati had a son whom he called Ruru. Not many years after Ruru was born it happened that Menaka, one of the dancing girls in the Court of the god Indra, fell in love with Visvavasu the King of the Gandharvas. King Visvavasu returned her love and Menaka bore to him

a baby daughter. To hide her marriage from the god Indra, she left the baby girl by the banks of a great river, which flowed past the hermitage of the mighty rishi Sthulokesha.

Sthulokesha had a kind heart and he pitied the little baby girl, who lay helpless among the reeds of the river. He lifted her in his arms and took her to live with him in his hermitage. And because she was the daughter of an immortal mother she surpassed in beauty all the daughters of men. But she was not lovely in face alone. Her heart was full of goodness and she loved the rishi Sthulokesha as if he had been her father. And because of her many virtues and of her love for him Sthulokesha named her Pramadvara. One day when Ruru was still a youth he wandered somewhat far into the forest. As he wandered, he suddenly saw in front of him the hermitage of the rishi Sthulokesha. And as he looked at it wondering what mighty sage lived there the beautiful Pramadvara came to the door. Instantly his heart was smitten with love for her. And going back to his father he said, "I have seen the loveliest girl in all the world and unless I wed her I shall die of love for her." Hearing Ruru's words and seeing his son's distress, Pramati went straight to the hermitage of Sthulokesha that stood in the heart of the forest. Bowing respectfully to the great rishi, Pramati addressed him saying, "Venerable Sir, my son Ruru has reached the age for marriage. Wandering through the woods he came to your hermitage and, seeing your daughter Pramadvara, was smitten with love for her. I have therefore come to beg you to give her in marriage to my son."

Sthulokesha received Pramati with all honour and

told him the story of Pramadvara's birth. Pramati heard the tale but still pressed for her marriage to his son. So Sthulokesha consented and he and Pramati betrothed Ruru to Pramadvara and appointed a day for their marriage, when the stars favourable to the youth and maiden were high in the heavens. But a few weeks before the day appointed for the ceremony, the beautiful Pramadvara was playing with some fair maidens of her own age near Sthulokesha's hermitage. In a bush near by lay a poisonous snake asleep. As Pramadvara ran, her foot pressed one of the snake's coils. Instantly it awoke and raising its head struck at Pramadvara, fastening its fangs in her bare foot. The poison coursed through her veins, the colour left her cheeks and she sank dying to the ground like a lily struck by the sun.

Sthulokesha was well-nigh mad with grief when he heard of the maiden's death. Pramati, too, sorrowed much. But Ruru grieved more even than Sthulokesha, because his love for Pramadvara was the greatest. Praying to the Immortals he recited his charities and his penances, his virtues and his austerities, that they might feel pity and restore to him the bride whom he so desired. As he prayed he saw a kingly figure come towards him from the forest. As the stranger drew near he said to Ruru, "O noble-minded youth, I am a messenger of the Immortals. They have noted your many good works and your pure life and they pity you deeply. But one whose span of life is ended cannot be saved from death. Pramadvara had lived the full number of her destined years. The gods, therefore, cannot bring her back to life. But if you, O Ruru, give up half your life to Pramadvara the gods will bring her back to you and you will live happily together."

Ruru's heart leapt with joy when he heard the words of the messenger of the Immortals. "O herald of the gods," he cried, "gladly will I give half my allotted span of life that Pramadvara may live again and be my bride." When the messenger of the Immortals heard Ruru's reply he vanished into the skies that he might tell it to the gods who had sent him. Ruru left the spot and hastened to where Pramadvara's body lay, to see if she lived or was dead. As he came close to her he saw that she still lay without motion. But a faint colour seemed to grow in her cheeks and on her pale lips. Her eyelashes began faintly to quiver. At last, waking up as if from a deep sleep, she opened her eyes and, seeing Ruru near her, smiled softly at him. Then Ruru told Sthulokesha and Pramati that Pramadvara had come back to life. And Sthulokesha and Pramati were overjoyed, and when the appointed day came, they joined the youth and maiden together in wedlock.

But because a snake had bitten the lovely maiden whom Ruru loved better than life itself, he hated from that day the whole race of snakes. And whenever he saw a snake in the grass or the woods he either struck it with his staff or cut it in pieces with his sword. One day, when Ruru was wandering through a dense part of the forest, he saw an old rock snake lying on the ground. Instantly he raised his staff to strike it. But the rock snake cried to him with a human voice, "Great sage, I have done you no hurt. Why are you angry with me and why do you seek my life?"

"My beloved wife," answered Ruru, "was once killed by a snake. I vowed, therefore, in my anger that I would slay every snake I saw. Therefore, O snake, prepare yourself for death, for I shall surely kill you."

"Venerable Sir," said the rock snake piteously, "I am not a poisonous snake. Rock snakes are but snakes in name for they cannot kill men even if they wish. Therefore we do not share the guilt of the snake people for the death of your wife. And it is your duty not to kill but to spare me."

Ruru looked closely at the rock snake and seeing that it had no poison fangs felt pity for it. He dropped his staff to his side and said, "O snake, tell me, I pray you, who you are. For you speak as a human being and I think you were once a man." "Great sage, what you say is true. Once I was a youth of your own years and by caste a Brahman. My name was Shahasrapata. But an angry wizard cursed me and thus changed my shape." Then Ruru said, "Pray tell me, good snake, the tale of your ill fortune."

"Venerable Sir," answered Shahasrapata, "I had a friend named Khagama. We played and grew up together. But whereas I took a joy in the pleasures of life, Khagama studied the works of the great rishis and by bitter penances attained their powers. One day when I returned home I saw Khagama plunged in meditation. Out of malice, I plaited together some strands of grass until they had the appearance of a snake. Going on tiptoe behind Khagama I placed the plaited grass upon his shoulder. Looking round with a start he saw, as he thought, a venomous snake upon his shoulder and he fainted with fear. Then I mocked him because he had feared a strand of plaited grass, until his fury was roused against me. 'Shahasrapata,' he said, 'you frightened me with a mock harmless serpent, so become now a mock harmless serpent yourself, to frighten others.' Then, great sage, I repented of what I had done and joining

my hands I bowed low before Khagama. 'I am your friend,' I pleaded, 'I meant no harm. I only wished to make you laugh. Take back your curse from me.' Khagama saw that I truly repented. But he said, 'O Shahasrapata, what I have said must happen. And a rock snake you must become. But when Ruru the son of Pramati appears to you, you will once more assume human form.' Therefore, O sage, I became a rock snake. But as you, Ruru, the son of Pramati, have appeared to me I shall once more become human." And as Shahasrapata spoke, Ruru saw him change swiftly into human form. When he had once more become a man he said to Ruru, "The highest morality, O sage, is this: destroy no life. Therefore do not wage war any more on the snake people. But spend your days in peace, enjoying the beauty of Pramadvara." When Shahasrapata had spoken thus he left Ruru and went to his own home. Ruru retraced his steps to his hermitage. And giving up the slaughter of the snake people, he passed the remaining years of his life in great happiness with Pramadvara.

NALA AND DAMAYANTI

Once upon a time there ruled over Vidarbha a mighty king named Bhima. But although his armies were victorious and his treasury overflowed with riches, he was unhappy; for he had no children. One day however, his unhappiness ceased. For there came to him as a guest a rishi named Damana. As befitted an Aryan king, Bhima treated the rishi with generosity, and both he and his queen poured treasures and gifts

into Damana's lap. The rishi was pleased and he in turn promised the royal couple that they would be blessed with three sons and a daughter. In due time the rishi's promise came to pass, and Bhima's queen bore him three sons and a daughter. And to honour the rishi the king called one son Dama, another Danta and the third Damana, and the daughter he called Damayanti. The three sons grew up strong and brave and tall, as befitted Aryan princes. But Damayanti grew into a maid so fair and so beautiful that all India could not furnish another to match her.

Now at this time there ruled over the country of the Nishadas a king named Nala. He was still quite a youth. But by his valour he had raised his kingdom to the highest pitch of glory. And in beauty he surpassed all the youths of India, just as Damayanti surpassed all the maids. And the comeliness of the prince and princess became a byword, so that Nala often heard speak of the loveliness of Damayanti. And in Damayanti's presence men often praised the handsome features and bold heart of the King of the Nishadas. In this way a passion for Damayanti entered Nala's heart, and a deep, pure love for Nala grew in Damayanti's maiden bosom. One day King Nala, restless because of his passion and unable to attend to his royal duties, wandered idly about his gardens. Suddenly he saw in front of him a flock of wild swans. And looking at them closely he saw that their wings were of pure gold. Swift as thought he rushed at one of them and before it could fly out of reach he held it fast. "O King," said the swan, speaking with a human voice, "do not kill me, I pray you. Spare me and in my turn I will render you a service." "What service," asked Nala, "could you, a swan, ren-

der me?" "O King," answered the swan, "I will so speak your praises to Damayanti that she will never care in her life for any man but you." The king was charmed by the reply and loosed the swan. The great bird shook itself, rose into the heavens and, soon overtaking its companions, led them into Damayanti's garden and settled to earth close to her feet. The fair princess and her handmaids were enraptured with the golden wings that flashed in the sunlight. "Let us catch one," cried Damayanti, "let us catch it and keep it." And as she spoke she and all her maidens ran forward to catch the beautiful swans. Instantly the flock separated in all directions and as the damsels followed them they too became separated, until at last Damayanti ran alone after the swan which Nala had caught and then let go. When the swan had led Damayant, into a hidden corner of the garden, it let Damayanti catch it and then spoke to her with human speech. "Fair princess," said the golden swan, "in the kingdom of the Nishadas lives the handsomest prince in all the world. On my powerful pinions I often cross over the earth and sometimes even enter the skies of heaven. But never have I seen a youth either mortal or immortal who can compare in beauty with Nala, King of the Nishadas. Choose him only as your husband. For as you are the loveliest of maidens, he is the most beautiful of youths." Then the love in Damayanti's heart for Nala grew into a passionate longing. "O swan," she said, "as you have praised Nala to me, so praise me to Nala." "I will," promised the swan and instantly rose in the sky, and, flying towards the country of the Nishadas, became a speck among the clouds and then vanished. But when it reached King Nala's garden it hovered

DAMAYANTI AND THE SWAN

over it until it saw him alone. Then settling at his feet it told him what it had said to Damayanti and what the princess's reply had been.

But although the swan vanished from Damayanti's sight her love for Nala grew until she could not rest nor even sit at ease. Her thoughts urged her always to rise and hurry towards Nala's side and she would spring from her couch only to remember that Nala lived ever so many leagues away. Then she would sink back with a sigh only to rise again a few moments later. In a day or two King Bhima noticed that Damayanti had grown thin, that her cheeks were pale, and that her eyes had lost their lustre. At first he feared for his daughter's health. Then he thought to himself, "She is now a grown woman. Let us bestir ourselves about her marriage." And at once he set himself to prepare for Damayanti's Swayamvara. To all the courts of India he sent heralds and in each court the heralds proclaimed, "O Kings and Heroes, King Bhima of Vidarbha will hold the Swayamvara of Damayanti. Then she will choose the bravest and fairest youth in India to be her husband. Come therefore and win, if you may, the hand of the loveliest princess in all the world."

The words of the heralds and the fame of Damayanti's beauty brought every prince in India to King Bhima's court; and there the king received them all courteously while they waited for the day appointed for the Swayamvara. But in their longing to excel and to win the love of the princess, they forgot the worship due by them to the great god Indra. Now it so happened that at this time the sage Narada went to Amravati, Indra's capital. The god received him with fitting honour and then asked him where the princes of India

had gone and why they neglected his sacrifices. "Lord Indra," said the sage, "King Bhima of Vidarbha has proclaimed the Swayamvara of his daughter Damayanti; and her beauty is such that every hero of India has gone to woo her." "And is she truly beautiful even to immortal eyes?" asked Indra. "Truly she is," answered Narada and he began to describe her charms. As he spoke, Agni the god of fire, Varuna the lord of the seas and Yama the god of death entered the hall where Narada sat with Indra, and while the four Immortals listened to the words of Narada as he portrayed Damayanti's beauty, there grew in their hearts a longing for her such as filled the heart of Nala. And getting ready their heavenly chariots, they too set forth to join the heroes who thronged Vidarbha, hoping that they might win Damayanti's favour. As the chariots sped through the air, the gods saw King Nala walking on the earth below them. Such was his stature and so superb was his bearing, that the hearts of the four gods sank within them. "Immortals though we be," they murmured, "our beauty pales before that of King Nala. If he is our rival we cannot hope that Damayanti will pass him by for one of us." Then they drove their cars to earth and alighted close to where Nala walked. And coming to the king they said, "We come to you as suppliants, King Nala, and we need your aid; promise therefore to act as our messenger." King Nala, not guessing their meaning but taking the gods to be suppliants as they said, lightly gave them his promise. "To whom do you wish," he asked, "that I should take a message, and who are you?"

Indra stepped forward and said, "O King, I am Indra; and these with me are the gods Varuna, Yama and Agni. We wish you to go to Damayanti and tell her that we

love her and that we bid her choose one of us four as her husband." But Nala said, "Lord Indra, I too love Damayanti, and, loving her, how can I plead another's suit?" "Nishada King," retorted Indra, "you forget that you are an Aryan prince and that you cannot go back on your word once given. You promised us that you would convey our message and now you would break your word." Nala sought in vain to escape from the snare. At last he said, "As you will, Lord Indra. But the palace of King Bhima is guarded night and day. How can I enter it?" "O King," replied Indra, "fear nothing; I shall take you past the guards." "As you will, Lord Indra," said Nala, and as the words left his lips he saw that he stood inside one of the palace rooms. On a couch in front of him rested the beautiful princess and round her stood her waiting maids. Suddenly they became aware of Nala's presence. Springing to her feet the princess cried, "Fair youth, who are you and how did you come here? For the doors of the royal palace are closed night and day and outside them the king's sentinels keep watch, day and night."

"Fair princess," said the king, with a smile that won Damayanti's heart, "I am Nala, King of the Nishadas. But I am come to you as a messenger of the Immortals. The gods Indra and Agni, Varuna and Yama, all love and long for you. Therefore choose one of them for your husband." But Damayanti shook her head sadly and said, "Fair Prince, I loved you before ever I saw you, because of what the golden swan told me of your beauty; and now that I have seen you I can never love another, even though he be an Immortal. Love me in return, O King Nala. For if you do not, I cannot bear to live longer." The king's heart leapt with joy, but he could

not press his suit, for he had promised the gods that he would be their messenger to Damayanti. "No, fair princess, do not lightly throw away the love of the Immortals ; if you wed one of them he will take you with him to his heaven and he will make you immortal like himself. And you will never know either pain or sickness or death." But Damayanti shook her head once more and tears streamed down her lovely cheeks. "I reverence the immortal gods," she said, "but I do not love them as a maid loves a man. Therefore take me to be your queen, O King, for I can wed none but you."

The king's joy grew until he could hardly control it. But he answered, "No, princess, I am come as the messenger of the gods and I promised to help them to win your love. How then can I take your love for myself ?"

Of a sudden Damayanti's face was wreathed in smiles. "Nay, if that is all, fair prince," she said, "I can free you from the snare in which the Immortals have taken you. Let them come to the Swayamvara. And do you too come, my lord King ; then, as the choice in a Swayamvara rests with the maid herself, I shall choose you to be my husband. Nor will the gods be able to blame you. For you have kept your promise truly."

The king bowed to the fair girl and turning went out of the palace. As he went, the bolted doors opened before him and the guards did not see him pass. Then crossing the royal pleasure grounds, he returned to where he had left Indra and the other gods. "O King," said Indra, "did you see Damayanti and give her our message?" "Yes Lord Indra," answered the king. "Whom among us has she chosen ?" asked Indra. "Lord Indra,"

said Nala, "I gave her your message and I bade her choose one among you and I promised her that he whom she chose would make her immortal like himself. Yet she rejected you all and vowed that she would have no husband but me. And she bade us all attend her Swayamvara. There she will choose me herself and no blame will rest on me. These were her words, Lord Indra. Do as you think fit."

When the moon was full, King Bhima held the Swayamvara ; and the arena was crowded with all the gallant princes and nobles who had hastened from all parts of India in the hope of bearing away Damayanti. But when the lovely princess entered it and took her seat, her beautiful deep eyes sought only the face of Nala. When she saw him her eyes lit up, but darkened a moment later with doubt. For standing beside the prince were four other princes exactly like him, so that it was impossible for her to say which of them was truly her beloved. For the gods, angry at her contempt of them, had, in order to punish her, assumed each the form of Nala, so that she might not choose him, but might in her confusion choose one of them as her husband. At last Damayanti in her grief prayed to the four gods and said, "Lords Indra and Agni and Yama and Varuna, pity me, for I am but a mortal maid. I have given my love to Nala and I can never love any but him. Of what value then can I be to you?" And she prayed so earnestly that the four gods pitied her and said to themselves, "Truly the maid loves Nala and in her heart there is no room for another. Let her then choose him and have her will." Her prayer finished, Damayanti looked again at the five Nalas in front of her and she saw that the feet of four of them did not rest on the ground and that no sign of dust

or heat was to be seen on their bodies. But the feet of the fifth rested on the ground and on his clothes lay the dust of the arena and his brow was burnt with the rays of the sun. Then she knew that the four were Immortals and that the fifth was her mortal lover the King of the Nishadas. With a smile she flung the garland with which she was to choose her suitor round the true Nala's neck and the assembled heroes knew that she had chosen her husband. All acclaimed her choice, for he was the handsomest of all those who had sought to win her. And Nala thanked Damayanti for having preferred him to an immortal husband and vowed that he would be hers alone while life lasted. And Damayanti thanked him and made him a like promise. Then both prayed to the four Immortals for their pardon and protection, and all four gods blessed the pair and gave them marriage gifts.

After the Swayamvara was over, King Bhima called together his Brahmans and they joined the youth and maid in marriage. A few days later King Nala took leave of King Bhima and in his chariot bore Damayanti away to the country of the Nishadas. There he gave her as a dwelling a beautiful palace surrounded by woods and pleasure grounds, so that in all India there was no happier queen than Damayanti. Nor was there anywhere a king so glad or so fortunate as Nala.

Now it so happened that as Indra and Agni and Varuna and Yama were returning from the Swayamvara they met the god Kali and with him was his companion Dwapara. "Lord Kali," said Indra, "tell me, I pray you, where you are going with Dwapara as your companion." "Lord Indra," said Kali, "the fame of the beauty of Damayanti, princess of Vidarbha, has reached my ears and has filled me with longing for her. And, hearing

that she is to choose her husband in a Swayamvara, I am going to Vidarbha to win her." "Lord Kali," laughed Indra, "I fear you will be late. The Swayamvara is over. For we were present at it, hoping also to win her as the bride of one of us. But she scorned us and chose King Nala as her husband." Then Kali grew angry and with gleaming eyes he cried, "Shall she who has scorned Immortals and chosen a mortal not suffer for her crime?" "No, Lord Kali," said Indra, "we pitied her and gave her leave to choose Nala, and indeed none could blame her. For he is the loveliest youth in all the land of the Aryas." With these words Indra and the three gods with him went on, leaving Kali and Dwapara silent. But the fury of Kali burnt fiercely within him and a few moments later he said, "O Dwapara, I cannot suffer that Nala enjoy the beauty of Damayanti. I shall enter into him and possess him. And I shall drive him forth from his kingdom, and from the arms of his bride. Thus all men shall know that it is evil to slight the Immortals."

Then Kali turned from Vidarbha and went to the country of the Nishadas. But so pure was Nala's life and so strict were his observances that Kali, watching day and night, saw no chance to enter into him and possess him. Thus for twelve years Nala and Damayanti lived together without a break in their joy. And Damayanti bore her lord a son whom she called Indrasena and a daughter whom she also called Indrasena. But in the thirteenth year their happiness perished. For King Nala, hearing grave news of state, hastened to consult his ministers, and in his haste he forgot, before doing homage to the Immortals, to wash his feet. Thus impure he entered the presence of the pure. Instantly Kali saw that his time had come, and entering the body of King Nala, he possessed him.

II

Now that Kali had entered into and possessed Nala, the king had no longer any will of his own and became the mere slave of the wicked god. Forced by Kali he went to the palace of his brother Pushkara and engaged with him in a game of dice. But such skill in gaming as Nala had became useless now that he was but the creature of Kali. And through his careless play and the fall of the dice, which at Kali's command fell always in Pushkara's favour, the king never ceased to lose his stakes to his brother. At last the news of the king's senseless gaming spread through the city. His subjects, who loved Nala devotedly, came with the king's ministers to his palace. And they begged Queen Damayanti to ask the king to see them. For they wished to implore him to abandon his dicing. But when Damayanti went to the hall where Nala gambled with his brother, the king, possessed of Kali, would not speak with her nor even cast his eyes in her direction. So the queen went back to the subjects and the ministers and told them that the king would not receive them. They returned sorrowfully to their own homes. But the king day after day continued to lose stake after stake to his brother Pushkara.

At last the king had lost his statues of silver and gold and his chariots and horses and all his jewelled robes of state. So the queen sent her nurse Vrihadesena to call the ministers once again to the palace. And when they had assembled at the outer gate, she again went to the hall where Nala and Pushkara gambled. "Lord King," said the queen, "the ministers crave an

interview of you. What answer shall I give them?" But the king, possessed by Kali, answered never a word. Then Damayanti, ashamed again to see the ministers, went to her own room and there sent for her charioteer Varshanaya. When he had come she said, "O Varshanaya, the king has always treated you with kindness and honour. Now do you in return shew kindness to me. Harness a chariot and a team of swift horses, and take my son Indrasena and my daughter Indrasena to the palace of my father Bhima, King of Vidarbha. For King Nala has lost his reason, and his gaming will surely bring ruin on himself and all his house." Varshanaya obeyed the queen's commands and bore away the young prince and princess to their grandfather's palace. But day after day Nala lost stake after stake to his brother Pushkara. At last Nala, who had lost all the wealth of his treasury, staked first his army and then his kingdom and lost them both. Then Pushkara said with a sneer, "My lord king, you have but one possession left to dice with. Stake Queen Damayanti and perhaps you may yet win back what you have lost to me." But King Nala would not stake the lovely queen, who for his sake had slighted the Immortals. Rising from his seat he took off his rich robes and flung them at Pushkara's feet. Then with only a single piece of cloth to cover him he walked out of the city. Damayanti saw what he did from the palace window. She too cast aside her royal robes and, clad only in a single piece of cloth, she walked out of the palace gates and followed the king. Pushkara, fearing that the subjects would take Nala's part and restore him to his lost throne, proclaimed that he would put to death anyone, no matter what his rank, who showed any pity to the fallen king. The subjects,

terrified at the threat, refused to give Nala food. So he and Damayanti lay outside the city eating only such herbs and roots as Nala could gather. One day, as he gathered them, he saw at his feet a flock of birds. In size they seemed wild geese but their wings were of pure gold. The king tore the cloth off his loins, hoping to catch them. But directly the cloth fell on their backs they rose into the sky, taking it with them. And as they flew, one of them said mockingly, " My lord the King, we are the dice which robbed you of your wealth and your kingdom. And we could not be happy until we had taken from you the single cloth which you still possessed. Now that you are stripped we are at rest."

The king went back to Damayanti and said in his grief, " O Queen, it is useless any longer to stay with one who is the victim of ill fortune. The dice in the guise of birds have spoiled me of my loin cloth, my sole possession. Do you, therefore, go back to Vidarbha and live with King Bhima and leave me to suffer alone." But the queen smiled bravely at him. " Nay, O King, " she said, " it is because you have fallen on evil days that I cannot leave you. For, in times of trouble, there is no such remedy as a wife's love. So come with me to Vidarbha. And my father will pay you such honour that you will soon cease to grieve over the loss of your kingdom. "

But King Nala answered sadly " Nay, Damayanti, I cannot go to Vidarbha with you. Your father King Bhima would, I know, receive me with all honour. And in old days I loved to go to his kingdom and lodge in his palaces. But now that I am a beggar the sight of his court and its splendour would only remind me of my own lost glory." Damayanti tried in various ways

to soothe him and to turn his thoughts from his troubles. And thus talking together they reached a wayside inn. There hungry and thirsty they flung themselves down on the ground. And the queen, worn out with fatigue and sorrow, fell into a deep slumber. But King Nala's mind was so troubled that sleep would not come to him. For a time he tossed about restlessly. Then the wicked god Kali, who possessed him, tempted him to rise and go out, leaving his wife alone in the wayside inn. "To take her with me," said the hapless king, "is but to take her to her death. If I leave her she will make her way to Vidarbha where King Bhima will lavish on her all she needs." Then suddenly he remembered his nakedness and taking a sword which hung on one of the walls of the inn, he stole back to Damayanti's side and with the sword cut off one half of Damayanti's single cloth and wrapped it round his own loins. Leaving the queen still sleeping he left the inn and went out into the night. But possessed though he was by Kali, his love for Damayanti hardly allowed him to leave her. He turned again and again and went back to the inn to gaze upon her beloved features. But at last Kali triumphed and Nala's love for Damayanti grew less and less. He looked at her for the last time and then like a man bereft of his mind he ran away as fast as he could, until he found himself in the heart of a great forest.

Next morning Damayanti awoke refreshed by her sleep. She looked round for Nala but her eyes sought him in vain. Then she saw that her single garment had been cut in half, so she guessed that the king must have cut it and gone out into the forest leaving her alone. For a time she was overwhelmed with grief.

But her grief was more for the king than for herself. For she asked herself how the king, whose mind was darkened, would live without her. At last she mastered her sorrow, and guessing rightly that the king had fled to the distant forest sadly made her way there in the hope of finding him. Blind to all else, she thought only of her husband the king and, paying no attention to the thorns that cut her garment and tore her flesh, she forced her way through the bushes that grew in her path and the creepers that hung from the trees. At last unawares she came to a spot where a mighty serpent had its lair. It saw her coming and, as she passed near, its great head seized her arm and in an instant its huge coils had wound themselves round her body. But even then at the point of death her thoughts were for her husband and she cried aloud for help, not that she might live herself, but that she might be freed and thus be able to seek him out and serve him as his faithful wife. Happily a hunter who lived in the forest heard her cries and coming near saw the unhappy queen in the coils of the snake. He drew his knife and with a single blow cut the monster's head from off its body. Then he freed the fainting queen and leading her to a spring close by bathed her wound and gave her water to drink. And when her strength returned he bade her tell her story. She did so, but as he listened, he fell in love with her and sought to drag her captive to his hut. Then the proud blood of Aryan kings boiled in the queen's veins and from heaven she called down on the hunter a fearful curse. "If it be true," she cried, "that I have never given a thought to any man save only my husband, King Nala, may the gods strike this wretch dead at my feet." The Immortals heard her prayer and

as she spoke a great flame shot down from heaven and enveloped the hunter. Damayanti, blinded by the flame, turned her eyes away. When she looked again she saw a heap of ashes where the man had stood.

Leaving the spot, and more than ever oppressed by grief, the queen went deeper still into the forest. When evening fell, she saw approaching her a tiger looking for its prey. "I shall go to this tiger," she murmured to herself, "and I shall ask him whether he has seen King Nala. Perhaps he may tell me; and even if he tears me to pieces, death is better than life without my beloved." Fearlessly Damayanti went close to the ravening brute and said, "O forest Lord! I am Damayanti, Queen of the Nishadas, and I seek my husband King Nala. If you have seen him tell me how I can find him. But if not, tear me to pieces, for I am sick of life." The tiger looked at Damayanti as if he would spring on her and devour her. Then, wondering at her, he turned aside and left her to seek his prey elsewhere. Damayanti sadly renewed her search until she came to a great mountain that reared its crest high into the heavens. "O Lord of Mountains," she cried, "I am a king's daughter and the wife of a king and the mother of a king to be. I am clad in a single soiled garment, yet my ancestors led forth hosts to conquer the earth. Tell me whether you have seen anywhere my husband Nala the true King of the Nishadas." But the mountain answered never a word and the wind sighed drearily through the trees overhead and Queen Damayanti turned away to renew her quest.

For three whole nights and days she wandered, her feet leading her to the North. At last she saw stretched in front of her gardens full of beautiful flowers and

orchards laden with beautiful fruit. And by rivulets that flashed in the golden sunlight, there rose huts made of leaves and branches. And deer roamed fearlessly through the orchards and drank in the running stream, and monkeys chased each other along the heavy boughs that shaded the huts. Then Queen Damayanti knew that she had come to the hermitage of sages weary of the world. As she drew near, an aged man, clad only in bark, came out to meet her. "Fair Lady," he said, "whoever you are, be welcome to our hermitage and tell us if there is anything that we can do for you, for we will surely do it." "Venerable Sir," answered the queen, "listen to my story." And she told the ascetic the tale of her life, how she was the daughter of Bhima, King of Vidarbha, how in a Swayamwara she had chosen as her husband Nala King of the Nishadas, and how after losing his throne at dice to his brother Pushkara he had fled away and left her. "And now," continued Damayanti, "I seek my husband until death overcomes me. But I pray that I may see him soon. For I am faint with hunger and weary with travel. And in a few days my strength will fail me and I shall die in the forest."

As the queen spoke, other sages came from their huts and listened to her moving words. And when she had finished, tears stood in their eyes, for they pitied her deeply. Then the sage who had welcomed her went to one side and seated himself under a tree and passed into a trance. The queen looking at him could not tell whether he had died or was still living. But in a short time he opened his eyes and returned Damayanti's glance. "O Queen," he said, "by my magic power I have seen the things to be. And I tell you truly that your grief shall pass away and that you shall once

more be joined to your noble husband Nala King of the Nishadas." Damayanti rose and was about to thank the sage from the bottom of her heart. When lo! before her eyes, the gardens smiling with blossoms and the orchards laden with fruit, the laughing stream and the huts shaded by leafy trees vanished. And she stood once more alone in the heart of the forest. The queen rubbed her eyes, for she could scarcely believe them. "Where are those kind old men?" she asked herself. "And the beautiful rivulet and the flowers and the fruit trees?" Then she began to despair, but of a sudden, when she recalled the words of the anchorite, her courage once more returned, and once more she journeyed to the North searching for her husband.

As she walked she saw in front of her a giant Asoka tree and she remembered that as a child her nurse had told her that Asoka trees could, if they would, relieve mortals of their grief. "O Asoka tree," she cried, "I am Damayanti Queen of the Nishadas. Have you by any chance seen my husband King Nala? He, who once went forth to battle clad from head to foot in mail, wears nothing now but a single rag to cover his loins. If you have seen him tell me; if not, take away from me the pain of my sorrow. For as a child I learnt that you could ease men of their grief." But although she waited long for an answer, the great tree gave none. Then to honour the Asoka tree she walked three times round its mighty trunk and with eye-lashes wet with tears she sadly resumed her quest.

At first the gloom of the forest deepened, but afterwards the trees grew farther apart and at last she came to the banks of a wide river on whose waters swam wild duck and geese and swans from beyond

the northern mountains. She walked up stream a little way, till she saw that a company of merchants had camped by the river. She hastened to join them, but seeing her worn with grief and toil and clad in a single rag, the merchants thought that she was an evil spirit of the woods and many of them ran away from her in terror. The leader of the merchants, however, spoke to her kindly and said, "Fair lady, who are you? Are you a mortal woman or are you, as we think, a spirit from the forest come to do us harm?" "No," said Damayanti sadly smiling, "I am no evil spirit but the daughter of a king. I seek my husband Nala King of the Nishadas. Tell me, fair sir, whether by any chance you have seen him." "O Queen," said the leader of the merchants, "I have met neither King Nala nor any other man in this forest; for only wild elephants and lions and other beasts of prey live here." "Pray tell me then, fair sir," asked Damayanti, "where you and the merchants with you are going. For perhaps if I go with you I may find my husband." The leader of the merchants answered, "O Queen, we are taking with us merchandise to sell for gain in the lands of Suvahu, King of the Chedis. And if you come with us we shall gladly take you."

The merchants and the queen journeyed several days together until they came to a large lake. Its surface was bright with lotus blossoms and its shores were gay with flowering shrubs. So the merchants halted and camped close to its waters. The same night, a herd of elephants came there to drink, and as the camp barred their way they rushed through it, trampling under foot and goring with their tusks all who came in their way. Many of the merchants perished and some of those who

escaped abused Damayanti as an evil spirit and the cause of their ill fortune. The queen, fearing for her life, left them and fled into the forest. There she met some Brahmans, for the merchants had come near to the city of Suvahu, King of the Chedis. The Brahmans led her to the gates of the city, and she entered it. But her hair was loose, her single garment hardly held together, and her face was worn with grief and hardship. And as she walked through the streets, the children, thinking her a mad woman, ran after her and mocked her.

At last she reached the royal palace where, through the doors, she saw the king's mother surrounded by a number of her attendants. Timidly Damayanti asked an aged nurse who stood by to take her into the presence of the queen mother. The nurse led her inside the palace and on the way asked her who she was. Damayanti said, "I am a serving maid, although of a high caste. I had a devoted husband, but he lost his fortune at dice. Then like a madman he left me and fled into the woods, and for many days I have been following him but have failed to find him." The nurse repeated what Damayanti had said to the king's mother and the latter was touched with her condition and her great beauty. "Stay with me," she said, "my men will search the woods, and sooner or later will find your lord and bring him back to you." Damayanti was weary with walking and she gladly accepted the kind offer. "I will willingly stay with you! O mother of heroes," she said. "But you must protect me, so that other men may not woo me. For I love my husband only." The queen approved her words and sent for her daughter-in-law, Sunanda, Queen of the Chedis. When the queen came, her mother said to her, "Sunanda, my daughter,

take this lady as your companion. She is of the same age as yourself and she will help you to pass your time when the king is with his ministers or is travelling through his kingdom." Sunanda looked at Damayanti and loved her instantly. Then taking her by the hand she led her joyfully into her own chamber.

III

After King Nala had forsaken his queen, he wandered at random through the forest until he saw a great fire in front of him. He would have hastened from the spot; but as he turned to go, he heard a voice that called, "Come hither! Come hither!" Thinking that the voice came from a man who had been surrounded by the flames, he forced his way through them until he reached an open space, where lay a monstrous snake. Seeing Nala, the snake said to him with a human voice, "My lord King, I am Karkotaka, the king of the snake people. Once I tricked the great sage Narada, and he cursed me, saying 'Lie here, motionless, until King Nala takes you away. Then only will you be freed from my curse.' So lift me up, I pray you, or I shall perish in the flames." The king bent down to lift the snake, fearing that he could never raise its mighty mass. But when his hands touched the snake, it became at once hardly bigger than his thumb. So raising it with ease, he carried it back with him through the flames until both were beyond their reach. Then he placed the snake on the ground. "Nishada King," said the snake, "walk away from me, counting your steps as you go." Nala did so. And as he walked away the snake followed him.

When the king had counted the tenth step the

snake reared its head and struck at Nala, biting him in the heel. As it bit him it assumed once more the form in which Nala had first seen it. Nala turned towards the snake in anger. But it said in a soothing voice, "Do not fear, Nishada King, you will suffer no harm from my bite. But an enemy has possessed you and my poison will torture him until it forces him to leave your body and to torment you no more. My advice to you now is that you should go to Ayodhya, the city of King Rituparna, and teach him your skill in horses and in driving chariots, and learn from him in return his skill as a dicer. For in dicing he has no equal in all the land of the Aryas. King Rituparna will befriend you, and through his help you will recover your wife and your son and your daughter. So do not be downcast with grief. And when you wish to look like your former self, put on these two pieces of cloth and let your thoughts rest on me." With these words the snake king gave Nala two pieces of rich cloth. Then, moving away swiftly through the ferns and grass, he vanished from the sight of his companion. But King Nala took the snake king's advice and bent his steps towards Ayodhya, reaching it on the tenth day. Then he asked to see King Rituparna and in due time King Rituparna gave him audience. Nala bowed humbly before King Rituparna. "O King," he said, "I am called Vahuka and I am most skilful in judging and in managing horses and especially in driving chariots. I am also a skilled accountant, and I have no equal as a cook. Take me, therefore, I pray you, into the royal service."

Now King Rituparna desired a skilful charioteer above all things, so he was pleased at Nala's words. "O Vahuka!" he cried, "I take you into my service,

for nothing delights me so much as swift driving. You shall be the chief of my stable-men and I shall pay you ten thousand pieces of silver yearly." So King Nala disguised as a charioteer entered the service of King Rituparna. But his thoughts always turned to the queen whom he had forsaken. And each night as he lay down he said aloud a verse in which he expressed his sorrow.

In the meantime the news had reached Bhima, king of Vidarbha, that King Nala had lost his kingdom and with his wife Damayanti had fled away from the country of the Nishadas. King Bhima called together the most learned Brahmans in Vidarbha and he addressed them saying, "Go forth and seek my daughter Damayanti and her husband King Nala. And to him who brings me news of them I will give a thousand kine, a hundred fields and a village as large as a city." So the Brahmans left Vidarbha and scattered in all directions, each hoping to find Damayanti and King Nala and to win for himself the reward offered by King Bhima.

In course of time the Brahmans returned, all but one, to the court of King Bhima, having sought King Nala in vain. But chance guided the footsteps of a Brahman named Sudeva to the chief city of the Chedis. He entered it and going to the royal palace saw Queen Sunanda through one of the windows. Damayanti was seated by her side, and although she looked tired and worn, Sudeva knew her to be the daughter of King Bhima. As one of the holy Brahman caste the guards permitted him to enter the palace. Gradually drawing near Damayanti he spoke to her in a whisper. "O daughter of Vidarbha," he said, "your father King Bhima is well and your mother and children also are well. But they

grieve for you deeply. And hundreds of Brahmans are travelling over all India to find out your hiding place." Damayanti in reply asked him eagerly for news of her parents and her children. And when she heard of them, her sorrow mastered her and she burst into tears.

Queen Sunanda seeing her weep rose hastily and told the king's mother. Then the queen mother ordered Sudeva to her presence. "Tell me, O Brahman," she said, "who this lady is and how you came to know her." "O mother of heroes," answered the Brahman, "she is Damayanti daughter of Bhima, king of Vidarbha, and wife of Nala, king of the Nishadas. But her husband lost his kingdom to his brother at dice, and taking Damayanti with him fled from his country. I am one of several hundred Brahmans sent by King Bhima to search for Damayanti, and lo! I have found her in your palace. She has a tiny mole between her eyebrows, and if you send for her you will see it and know that she is Damayanti." The queen mother sent for Damayanti, and finding the mole between her eyebrows embraced her. "Dear girl," she said, "you are my sister's daughter. Your mother and I were the daughters of Sudaman, king of the Dasharnas. Your mother was wedded to King Bhima and I to King Virabahu. But when you were born I was present and I remember well the tiny mole between your eyebrows. For you have had it from the day of your birth. Therefore let this palace be your home for ever."

But a fierce desire in Damayanti's heart was kindled to see her children once again. Bowing low before the queen mother she said, "I could never indeed have a happier home than this. But my heart aches to see my children. Therefore give me a chariot, so that I may go back again to my father's city." "So be it," said the

queen mother sadly, and she ordered a chariot for Queen Damayanti. And Damayanti, escorted by a strong band of horsemen, returned with Sudeva to Vidarbha. Then King Bhima greeted her joyfully, and he bestowed on Sudeva a thousand kine, a hundred fields, and a village as large as a city. And over and above this, the promised reward, the king gave him a great treasure of gold.

When Queen Damayanti had seen her parents and her children her heart still ached, for she missed her gallant husband King Nala. At last she said to her mother, "My mother, bring King Nala to me or I shall die!" Urged by his queen, King Bhima again sent out several hundred Brahmans in all directions. When the Brahmans were about to start, Damayanti sent for them and said, "Holy Sirs, repeat these words wherever you go and to whomever you meet, 'O King, O Gambler, O Beloved, your devoted wife, whom you forsook asleep in the forest, still loves you and still awaits you.' Should any one answer you, tell me of him, but do not let him know that it was I who sent you." The Brahmans promised to fulfil Damayanti's command and scattering in all directions they began to search for King Nala. At last a Brahman, Parnada by name, came back to King Bhima's city and sought out Damayanti. "O Queen," he said, "after many days of travel I came to the city of Ayodhya which is ruled by King Rituparna. And after gaining an audience with the king I said in his presence and his court the words which you told me. But neither the king nor any of those with him answered me or grasped the meaning of my words. But after my audience, the king's charioteer, Vahuka by name, came close to me and said to me in a broken voice, 'Fair Sir, a wife, even though forsaken by her husband, should for-

give him, especially if his mind is clouded by calamity.' Hearing these words I left the city of Ayodhya and with all speed returned to tell you."

Damayanti, on hearing Parnada's story, knew that Vahuka must be her husband King Nala, so she hastened to her mother the queen and said, "O my mother, I beg you to send Sudeva to the court of King Rituparna to see if King Nala is there. But do not let my father King Bhima know that I have sent him." The queen consented, and sent for Sudeva; and Damayanti said to him. "Go as swiftly as you can to Ayodhya the city of King Rituparna and say to the king, 'My lord King, hasten to Vidarbha. For Damayanti, daughter of King Bhima is once more about to hold a Swayamwara. And all the Aryan heroes are thronging to it. For her husband King Nala has fled away and no one knows whether he is alive or dead.' "

Sudeva bowed and departed. Soon he reached the city of Ayodhya and there gave Damayanti's message to King Rituparna. The king at once decided to go to Vidarbha, for the fame of Damayanti's beauty had spread over all the earth. Immediately he bade Vahuka harness the fastest horses in his stables that he might hurry with all speed to the Swayamwara of Queen Damayanti. King Nala's heart was heavy when he heard of Damayanti's Swayamwara. "The fault is mine," he said to himself: "I forfeited her love by forsaking her. But if I go to Vidarbha she will perhaps remember me again. And if not, still I shall once more feast my eyes on her beauty." But aloud he said, "If you wish it, O King, I will drive you to Vidarbha in a single day." So saying, he went to the royal stables and chose horses from Sind, slight, strong and enduring

and each with ten curls on its forehead.

When King Rituparna entered the chariot the horses fell and the king said, "O Vahuka, these lean horses will never draw our chariot to Vidarbha." But King Nala patted and stroked the horses until they stood once more on their feet. Then with a touch of his whip he made them gallop. And such was their speed that soon Rituparna thought that he was travelling through the sky. And the king was so delighted that he asked Nala whether he would teach him how to drive a chariot, if in return he taught Nala his own skill in calculation. King Nala readily agreed. He knew that Rituparna was unrivalled in the art of dicing and in calculation. For as they drove alone through the woods Rituparna would often tell Nala how many leaves each tree had. And when King Nala had got down and counted the leaves, he had always found Rituparna's figure to be right. So, as King Nala drove King Rituparna from Ayodhya to Vidarbha, Rituparna expounded to him the whole art of dicing and King Nala in turn showed Rituparna the various devices by which he trained horses to do his bidding.

Now all the time that King Nala had been at Ayodhya the poison of Karkotaka the snake king had been tormenting the evil god Kali, and at last Kali could bear the torments no longer. While King Nala was learning King Rituparna's skill in dicing, the god Kali left his body and with folded hands stood humbly before him. Then King Nala, freed from his possession, knew how Kali had brought about his ruin and turned in anger on the god, meaning to curse him. But the god, fleeing from King Nala, hid himself in a Vibhitika tree. And King Nala, no longer seeing him, continued to drive Rituparna's chariot

to Ayodhya. When the chariot had gone, the evil god Kali slunk out of the Vibhitika tree and went shamefacedly to his own kingdom. But the Vibhitika tree which he had possessed withered away and rotted to the ground.

IV

The same evening—such was the mettle of King Rituparna's steeds and the skill of King Nala as a driver—the chariot thundered through the gates of King Bhima's city. So furious was the speed and so loud the roar of the chariot wheels as they crushed over the paving-stones, that Damayanti, listening in her chamber, felt sure that the driver was none other than her beloved husband. So, too, did the animals in the royal parks. And the peacocks cried with delight and the elephants trumpeted and the horses whinnied. For Nala had always loved animals, and all animals loved him and knew the sound of his chariot wheels as he drove through the city. The chariot bore King Rituparna to the gates of the royal palace. But as he went he was filled with amazement. For he saw no signs of the coming Swayamwara of the Lady Damayanti. No tents whitened the plain to afford shelter to the heroes who would try to win her. Nor was any arena to be seen outside the city walls.

When he reached the gates of the palace King Bhima greeted him saying, "My Lord the King, you are most welcome. But do not take it amiss if I ask you to tell me what business has led you to my kingdom." Rituparna was still more astonished for now he felt sure that no Swayamwara would be held. But he was ashamed to own his error. So he answered with a courteous smile, "My Lord King Bhima, I have only come

to Vidarbha to pay you my homage." Then King Bhima in turn was amazed. For the land of King Rituparna was far from Vidarbha and he knew that he would not have come so far merely to pay his homage. But he also hid his wonder and again bade his guest welcome and gave him a palace to dwell in, hoping that in time he would unravel Rituparna's secret.

Then Nala unyoked the horses from the chariot and led them past the window where Damayanti sat watching. But he was so changed by grief and travel and his charioteer's dress that Damayanti was not sure that he was her husband. She called her serving maid Keshini. "O Keshini," she said, "go to the stables and speak with Vahuka the charioteer, and ask him who he is. For I think that he is my husband King Nala. But he is so changed that I can not recognize him. So make enquiries of him and also give him the message which formerly I gave to Parnada." Keshini went down into the courtyard and approached Vahuka the charioteer. "Good Sir," said Keshini, "tell me what brought you here. For Queen Damayanti, daughter of King Bhima, wishes to know Rituparna's errand." "Fair serving maid," answered Nala, "a Brahman came to the court and told King Rituparna that Queen Damayanti would hold a second Swayamwara. So he drove here furiously, hoping to win her hand." "But," said the serving maid, "tell me, good charioteer, whose son you are and what post you hold under King Rituparna." King Nala answered, "I am, as you see, the king's charioteer but I also cook for him." "Pardon me yet another question," said Keshini. "Have you as charioteer to King Rituparna learnt by any chance where Queen

Damayanti's husband King Nala has fled." "No," said King Nala, "I have not. Nala himself alone knows where Nala is hiding." Then Keshini, seeing that his eyes fell before hers, whispered softly the words which the Brahman, Parnada, had said in the audience chamber of King Rituparna. "O King, O Gambler, O Beloved, your devoted wife whom you forsook asleep in the forest still loves you and still awaits you." And King Nala whispered back, "A wife, even though forsaken by her husband, should forgive him, especially if his mind is clouded by calamity." When he had spoken thus King Nala burst into tears. And Keshini, slipping away from him, hastened back to her mistress and told her what had happened.

Then Damayanti, still uncertain whether Vahuka was her husband, bade Keshini watch him closely and learn whether he shewed any signs of royal origin; and for several days Keshini watched Vahuka closely. Then going to Damayanti she said, "Vahuka must indeed be a king, for he masters even the elements themselves. If he comes to a door too small for him to pass through erect, he does not stoop. But the door, to do him honour, grows higher. If he wants water, he merely looks at his water vessels and they instantly fill with water. If he wants fire he holds up grass in the sun's rays and instantly it is ablaze. Once I saw him take flowers in his hand and crush them. But the flowers instead of fading grew more beautiful and had a richer perfume than before." But Damayanti was not yet satisfied. "O Keshini," she said, "go to the kitchen and bring me some of the food which Vahuka has cooked for King Rituparna"; and Keshini did so. And Damayanti, for whom Nala had often cooked

dishes in the past, recognized the mode of cooking as King Nala's.

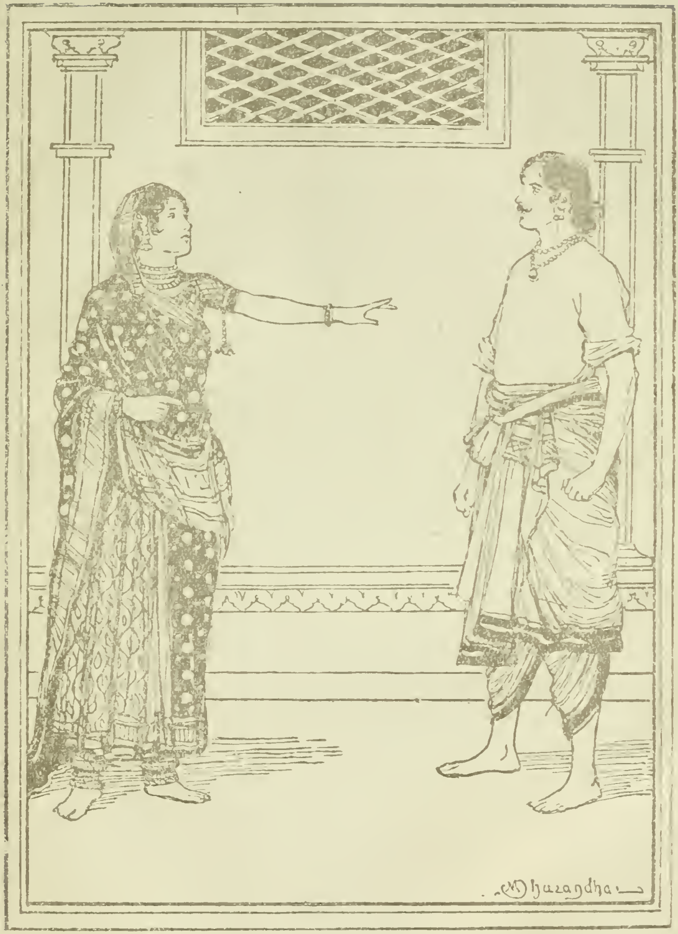
Then she knew that Vahuka must in spite of his disguise be none other than King Nala. But she imposed yet another test on him. "O Keshini," she said, "take my son Indrasena and his sister to Vahuka and see whether he recognizes them." Keshini did as she was ordered, and King Nala on seeing them burst into tears. "Fair serving maid," he said, "the prince and princess resemble my own children so closely that I could not keep from weeping." Keshini told his words and conduct to Queen Damayanti. And she, now certain that Vahuka was her beloved, resolved to meet him. She went to her mother the queen of Vidarbha and said, "King Rituparna's charioteer is none other than my husband Nala. I wish to meet him. Therefore ask my father King Bhima's permission for my husband to meet me in the palace or for me to go to him in the stables, where he looks after King Rituparna's horses." The queen asked leave of King Bhima and the latter agreed that King Nala might enter Damayanti's apartments.

Damayanti matted her hair and covered her head with dust and clay to meet him. When King Nala entered she addressed him thus, "O Vahuka, what do you think of a man who could forsake his wife in the forest, when she had done him no evil, but had borne him children? Yet that was what King Nala did; he who had held my hand before the fire and in the presence of the Immortals. Tell me, O Vahuka, what do you think of King Nala's conduct?" King Nala's eyes filled with tears of sorrow and shame. "My queen, I am guiltless. It was not I but the evil god Kali who lost me my kingdom.

It was not I, but he, who forsook you in the woods. He possessed me and, while he did so, I was his slave. But Karkotaka the snake king bit him and so tormented him with his poison that he left me. But you, my Queen, what have you done? You have proclaimed by your messengers that you will hold a second Swayamwara and marry a second husband. For this reason King Rituparna bade me drive him in his chariot to Vidarbha".

Damayanti grew frightened, for Nala spoke to her with frowning brows and in angry tones. "O King my husband," she said, "how could you think that I would really choose a second husband while you were alive— you whom I had preferred to an Immortal? It was nothing but a device to bring you to Vidarbha, for the Brahman, Parnada, had told me that you were in Rituparna's service. So do not be angry with me. For touching your feet I swear to you that never even in thought have I been anything but true to you." But Nala's face did not grow softer. Then Damayanti cried aloud, "O all-seeing Wind that surrounds the earth, take away my life if I have sinned against my Lord! O Sun that daily crosses the sky, take away my life, if I have sinned against my Lord! O Moon that enters the hearts of all living things, take away my life, if I have sinned against my Lord!" And from the heavens the wind god answered, "King Nala, it is the truth that she speaks; she has done no evil against you. When she proclaimed at King Rituparna's court that she would hold a Swayamwara, she only wished to see you again. Do not doubt her conduct, but be united with her once more." And as the wind god spoke, the other gods showered down flowers upon the pair.

Then Nala's doubts vanished. He remembered the



NALA AND DAMAYANTI

parting words of Karkotaka the snake king, "When you wish to look like your former self, put on these two pieces of cloth and let your thoughts rest on me." So he put on the two pieces of cloth, for he had brought them with him, and he let his thoughts rest on the snake king Karkotaka. Instantly the weariness of age and of travel fell off him like a worn-out garment. And Damayanti saw by her side the beautiful youth who had won her hand and her heart in the Swayamwara years before. She burst into tears. And King Nala embraced her tenderly and then embraced his son Indrasena and his daughter Indrasena. Damayanti's mother found them locked in each others' arms and hastened gladly to tell King Bhima. But King Bhima said wisely, "Let Damayanti and Nala be together to-day. To-morrow I shall receive him in court with Damayanti at his side."

That day King Nala and Damayanti spent in great happiness telling each other all that had happened to them since their separation. And next day King Nala paid his homage to King Bhima. And the citizens, overjoyed at the return of Damayanti's lord, decked the streets with flags and flowers and garlands. But King Rituparna marvelled more than ever. For not only was no Swayamwara held, but his charioteer Vahuka had proved to be King Nala. So he asked for an audience of his former servant and begged his forgiveness for having treated him in a way unbefitting to a king. Nala reassured him. "King Rituparna," he said, "had you done me any wrong I should gladly pardon you. But I cannot forgive you when you have committed no error." Not long afterwards King Rituparna appointed another man charioteer in Vahuka's place and after bidding farewell to King Bhima and

to King Nala drove back with his guards to his city of Ayodhya.

But King Nala longed to return to his kingdom, the country of the Nishadas. For he had learnt the whole art of dicing from King Rituparna. And he knew that if he gambled again with Pushkara he would certainly recover all he had lost from him. So he took leave of King Bhima, and with a small escort started again for the country of the Nishadas. On reaching the chief city, he sent word to his brother Pushkara that he had earned vast wealth and wished again to dice with him. On hearing the message Pushkara received King Nala and asked him what he would stake on the throw of the dice. "Let your stake" answered King Nala, "be your kingdom and your life. My stake shall be my wealth and my peerless queen, Damayanti. And if you do not care for such high stakes, take your bow and arrows and let us fight each other in the open plain outside the city." Pushkara, who felt sure that he would win as before, said with a laugh, "You are indeed fortunate, my brother, to have won such wealth. And I will gladly gamble with you. For I have always loved Damayanti and now am sure that she will be mine." King Nala could hardly control his rage. He answered hotly, "Before boasting, Pushkara, of your love for Damayanti you had better wait for the fall of the dice!"

Then the two brothers began once more to dice. And Nala by means of the knowledge he had learnt from King Rituparna soon defeated Pushkara, who thus lost in a few moments not only the kingdom which he had won, but his life. And King Nala said to him with a laugh, "Now that you are a slave, Pushkara, do you still hope to win Damayanti's

love?" Then he paused and his heart melted towards his brother. "Pushkara," he said softly, "it was not you but Kali who worked my ruin. I shall not punish you for another's fault. You are a free man and I shall give you as before a younger brother's portion." And Pushkara's heart was touched at his brother's generosity. "O King," he said, "you have restored me my life and my honour. May your fame be immortal. And may your life last ten thousand years."

The two brothers spent a happy month together in the royal palace. Then King Nala, dismissing Pushkara, bade him go to the lands which were his as a younger brother. And now that Nala was once again on the throne he sent for Damayanti and her father King Bhima. And when they heard the news they were overjoyed and journeyed with a large army to the country of the Nishadas. There King Nala and his subjects gave the queen a right royal welcome. And King Nala, grown wiser through his adversity, ruled over his kingdom with such wisdom that no other kingdom in India was governed like it. And when at the close of a long life King Nala died, he was regarded by all as the chief of the kings in all the lands of the Aryas.

SATYAVAN AND SAVITRI

Once upon a time there ruled over the Madva people a great king called Asvapati or lord of horses. His subjects loved him, his fame was great and his riches immense. But he was not wholly happy, because he had no children. As he grew older his longing for children increased.

And he fervently worshipped Brahmadeva's Queen, the goddess Savitri, and became an anchorite that he might win her favour. For eighteen years he worshipped her, until at last he won her favour and she vouchsafed him a vision. Out of a sacrificial fire which he had built up for her, she rose in all her splendour and glory. "O King Asvapati," she said, "O Lord of Horses, for eighteen years I have watched your piety and your pure life. I have vouchsafed you this vision in order that you may ask me a boon. Ask me a boon, therefore, and whatever it is, unless it is something evil, I shall willingly grant it to you".

"Great Goddess," said King Asvapati, "I long for children. I practised austerities and worshipped at your shrine that you might grant me them. If therefore you are pleased with me, graciously grant me this boon."

"O King," said Savitri, "I knew your desires before you told them to me. Before I left Brahmagiri I entreated the Lord Brahmadeva on your behalf. He has graciously listened to my entreaties and has promised me that soon a beautiful daughter shall be born to you. This is the Lord Brahmadeva's command. But do not thank him for he has no need of a mortal's thanks". "So be it," said the king reverently and with bowed head. When he again lifted his eyes Savitri had vanished.

A year later the king's eldest queen, Malavi, bore him a beautiful little baby girl, and because the goddess Savitri had vouchsafed her birth in answer to the king's prayers, he and Queen Malavi called the little girl Savitri also. As the years passed by Savitri grew into the most lovely maiden in all the land of the Aryas. Her father's subjects adored her as if she were a goddess. But her tall form and imperious beauty so awed the young princes of

India that none came forward to ask for her hand. King Asvapati grieved that no suitor wooed his beautiful maid. At last he sent for Savitri. "My daughter," he said, "you are a grown woman and it is time for you to marry. But no suitor comes to win you. Go therefore through the land of the Aryas and seek some youth fit to be your husband." Savitri, blushing deeply, took leave of the king. In a short time the king's charioteer drove up a golden chariot to the door of her palace, and seated in it and accompanied by wise ministers and horse soldiers with glittering lances, she journeyed in turn to the various shrines and holy places of India.

She was absent for several months. In her absence the sage Narada visited the court of Asvapati, king of the Madvas. The king greeted the great sage with befitting reverence, and king and anchorite were talking together when a royal messenger announced that the Princess Savitri had returned and was driving through the outer gates of the royal palace. The sage Narada asked the king where she had been and why he did not wed her to some Aryan hero. "For that very purpose," answered the king, "I sent her away. She will now announce to me whom she has chosen for her husband." Just then the princess entered the royal hall and the king bade her tell him on what hero her love had fallen. The princess blushed and said with a smile that made her lovelier than before, "O King Asvapati, my father, there ruled some years ago in the land of the Salyas a noble king named Dyumatsena. But while still in the prime of life and while his son was but a tiny child the king's eyes failed him and he became blind. Hearing of this a neighbouring king, over whom King Dyumatsena had in earlier years

triumphed, sought his revenge. He suddenly attacked the land of the Salyas, overthrew the king's army and forced King Dyumatsena to flee with his queen and the little prince to the forest. There King Dyumatsena became a hermit and renounced the world. For eighteen years he has lived with his wife and son. And now the son, Satyavan by name, has grown to splendid manhood. I have seen him and I love him, and he alone shall be my husband."

So saying the lovely princess bowed before her father and the great sage Narada, until her head touched their feet.

"Alas!" exclaimed Narada, "alas! Your daughter, O King, has made but a foolish choice." "Venerable Sage," said the king anxiously, "is not Prince Satyavan wise and brave, tender-hearted and handsome?" "He is indeed," said Narada, "Prince Satyavan is as wise as Brihaspati, as brave as the god Shiva, as tender-hearted as mother earth, and as beautiful as an eastern moon. But he has one defect which outweighs all his virtues. Exactly one year from today Prince Satyavan's life will come to a close."

"O my daughter," cried King Asvapati "choose another husband. For if you wed Satyavan, in a few months you will be a widow."

"No, my father," said Savitri, "my love once given can never be given to another. I chose Prince Satyavan to be my husband. I love him and him only will I wed." The courage of the beautiful maid touched the sage's heart. "O King," he said, "the maid will never wed any one but Satyavan. Let her, therefore, have him for her husband." The king bowed before Narada and said, "Venerable Sir, as you will, so shall it be!"

The same day Narada took his leave and King Asvapati began to prepare for his daughter's wedding. On an auspicious day he gathered round him the wisest Brahmans of the realm, and taking his daughter with him set out in his chariot for the hermitage of King Dyumatsena. When they reached the forest, he left his chariot and walked on foot until he found King Dyumatsena seated on a mat of kusa grass in the shade of a teak tree. King Asvapati bowed and told the royal hermit who he was. And Dyumatsena offered him a cow from his herd by way of welcome. King Asvapati took the gift and in return told King Asvapati the object of his coming. King Dyumatsena at first demurred. "How will your daughter," he asked, "bear the hardships of the forest? In the old days when I was king of the Salyas I would gladly have accepted your offer. But today when I am but a forest hermit, how can I?" "No," answered King Asvapati, "I have set my heart on the marriage; therefore do not thwart me." "If that be so," replied King Dyumatsena, "let the wedding be this very day." King Asvapati agreed. The two kings called together the Brahmans who had followed King Asvapati and those who lived in the hermitage, and that very day they united Satyavan the prince of the Salyas with Savitri the beautiful princess of the Madvas.

II

Wedded to Satyavan, Savitri cast aside her ornaments and her silken garments and clothed herself in bark and in coarse red rags, so that she might not shame King Dyumatsena and those round him by her finery. She soon won the love of her husband's people and she gave

herself wholly to her husband and thought of nothing else all day long but how to please him. But a dark cloud hung over her happiness, for she could not forget the words which the sage Narada had uttered, namely that Prince Satyavan must die within a year. At last the appointed time was only three days off, and Savitri, in the hope of moving the Immortals, vowed that she would touch no food until Prince Satyavan had survived the hour fixed for his death. At last the day itself dawned. Savitri worshipped the sun and the fire blazing on the hearth. Then she bowed to all the Brahmans of the king's household, and to King Dyumatsena and to her mother-in-law, and they in turn blessed her saying, "Daughter, may the gods grant that you never lose your husband." Then they pressed her to eat. But she again repeated her vow to let nothing pass her lips until Satyavan's hour of peril was over. Suddenly the prince rose and taking a hatchet set forth for the forest. Instantly Savitri rose also. "Wait my husband," she said, "let me go with you. To-day I cannot leave you." Satyavan sought to dissuade her. "You are weak with fasting," he said, "and the paths are steep and rugged." But Savitri's love for the prince overcame her weakness and she begged him earnestly not to forbid her. Satyavan at last consented but told her to bid the king and queen farewell. For he was afraid that she might die of fatigue in the forest. Savitri did so, and explained to them that she could not abandon Satyavan on his last day of life. Nor could she beg him not to go into the forest. For he said that he wished to cut wood for the sacrificial fire. The king and queen understood, and blessing her they bade her care for Satyavan. Savitri went back to the prince and the two entered the woods. And the prince

pointed out to Savitri the streams sparkling in the sunlight and the flowering shrubs and the peacocks that looked down upon them from the boughs of tall, leafy trees. But Savitri's heart was heavy. And although her lips answered Satyavan, her thoughts dwelt always on his coming peril. The prince, thinking nothing of his danger, climbed into the trees and plucked their fruit, and with his hatchet he cut down boughs for the sacrificial fire. Suddenly he felt a sharp pain in his head, his limbs began to ache and sweat stood out upon his body. Slowly he walked back towards Savitri. And Savitri, seeing his illness, ran to him and made him lie down, and taking his head in her lap bade him sleep and rest. The prince was soon unconscious. But Savitri, who knew that the hour of danger had come, looked anxiously about her. Soon she saw by her side a giant of monstrous aspect. His face was black and yellow. His eyes were bloodshot. His clothes were red, and in his hand was a mighty noose, and he wore a huge gold and jewelled crown that flashed back the rays of the sun. Savitri guessed that he was Death, come to claim her husband. Bravely she moved the prince's head from her lap to the ground and, rising to her full height, she faced the giant. Joining her hands together she said with a trembling voice, "My lord, from your mighty form I know you to be no mortal but a god. Tell me who you are and what you desire?"

"I am Yama the god of Death," answered the giant. The prince's hours were numbered from his birth and with the noose in my hand I shall bind him and drag him away." "Lord Yama," replied Savitri, "how is it that you have yourself come to drag away Satyavan and not, as is your custom, sent one of your messengers?"

"A prince so great and so noble as Satyavan," said Yama, "deserved that I should come in person to take him away."

With these words he bound with his noose the helpless form of the prince and began to drag him away towards the south. Savitri, stricken with grief, followed. A few minutes later Yama turned round and saw that she followed. "Go back, Princess," he said, "you must return home now, and there honour the dead prince with the last rites."

Savitri bravely faced the god and said, "The wise have said that by walking but seven paces together one contracts friendship with another. Thus I have become your friend. Listen, therefore, I pray you, to what I say. It is my duty to follow my husband wherever you take him, even if I go to my death also. For true happiness lies in wedlock and neither celibacy nor widowhood equal it in merit."

Yama was touched with Savitri's words and replied, "Princess, I, too, consider myself your friend. Ask me, therefore for any boon you will except only the life of your husband, and I shall grant it to you." "Lord Yama," said the princess, "my father-in-law is blind. Graciously give him back his sight. That is the boon that I ask of you." "Princess," said Yama, "I grant you the boon. King Dyumatsena will recover his sight."

But Savitri still followed. Shortly afterwards King Yama turned and saw her. "Princess, you are wearied with walking. Turn back home, I beg of you. For you will gain nothing by journeying further." "Lord Yama," answered Savitri, "I feel no fatigue while I stay with my husband, and where he goes there also shall I go. For Satyavan was a virtuous prince, and the wise have

said that but a single day spent with the virtuous is a great gain. So I desire to spend all my life in his company."

Yama's heart was again touched with Savitri's words. "Princess, your words are full of wisdom and they please me. Ask of me, therefore, a second boon. And if it is not Satyavan's life I shall grant it to you." "Lord Yama," answered the princess, "my father-in-law King Dyumatsena through his blindness lost his kingdom. The second boon that I ask of you is this. Grant that the king my father-in-law may recover his kingdom." "Princess," replied King Yama, "your boon is granted and Dyumatsena will soon be ruling happily over the kingdom of the Salyas. But now I pray you to return homewards. For you are very weary."

But still Savitri followed King Yama. And he again asked why she did not turn back. "Lord Yama," said the princess, "even righteous mortals shew mercy to their enemies when they seek their protection. You are a god and you have declared yourself my friend. It is proper for you therefore to shew me mercy." "Indeed, I will gladly shew you mercy," answered King Yama. "But I cannot grant you Satyavan's life. Ask me another boon and I shall grant it to you." "As you will, Lord Yama," said Savitri. "The boon that I ask for is this. My father King Asvapati has no son. Grant that he may have a hundred sons." "I grant you the boon," said King Yama, "and now I pray you retrace your steps."

But Savitri still followed King Yama. Once again King Yama turned back and pressed her to go homewards. "Lord Yama," said the princess, "you have shewn me kindness and you have shewn mercy. But you

are the Lord of Justice and it is for you now to shew me justice. I therefore beg of you my lord Satyavan." "O Princess," said King Yama, "the life of Prince Satyavan I cannot give you. Ask me any other boon and it shall be yours." "I thank you, Lord Yama," answered Savitri, "and the boon that I ask is this—grant that I may bear to Prince Satyavan a hundred sons, strong, brave and beautiful as he was."

"O Princess," said King Yama, "I grant you this boon but I cannot grant you any more. So turn back homewards and do not weary yourself in vain by following a dead husband." "No, Lord Yama," said Savitri, and her wan face lit up with a smile of triumph, "the boon which you have just granted me cannot take effect, unless you give me back Satyavan. You are an Immortal and righteous, and you will not let your words prove false. Therefore give me back Satyavan so that I may bear him a hundred sons."

King Yama thought deeply but he could see no escape from the snare in which the brave princess had taken him. At last he said, "So be it, Princess. I set free your husband. You will bear him a hundred sons, strong, brave and beautiful as he himself is. And I add to the boons which I have given you yet another. You shall both live for four hundred years."

With these words King Yama unbound Prince Satyavan and, leaving him lying on the ground, departed immediately to his kingdom far away in the South. But Savitri went up to her husband's body and sitting down beside him once more placed his head on her lap. In a short time he awoke and looked round him, not knowing where he was. At last he said, "O Savitri, I have slept long. Why did you not wake

me? Where is the monster that was dragging me away?" "Dear lord," said Savitri, "Yama, King of Death, came to take you away. He has gone. So let us hasten homewards, for night has fallen." But Satyavan's wits were still wandering. "Tell me what happened to me," he asked. "I fell asleep and then I dreamt that it grew dark and that a giant with a shining crown seized me. I can remember no more. Tell me whether there was any truth in my dream."

"Dear lord," said Savitri, "the night has fallen, let us hasten home. To-morrow I shall tell you all that happened while you slept."

But the prince looked around him and saw that the night was dark and bade Savitri stay where they were until sunrise. "As you will, dear lord," said the princess. "There is a forest fire on the hills and by its light we can guide our steps. But if you wish to spend the night where we are, I shall kindle a fire here, and we can pass the hours happily until day dawns." Of a sudden Prince Satyavan thought of his parents. "Dear Princess," he said "we must go home. My mind was clouded with sleep and I forgot my father and mother. I am their only hope and happiness. They will be torn with anxiety because of my absence. Let us hurry home as quickly as we can." Savitri consented, and as her husband was still weak from his long trance, she took his hatchet in her right hand and supported him with her left. And thus helping him she led him home.

But King Dyumatsena and his wife Queen Saivya were roaming to and from their hermitage searching in vain for Satyavan. For they were very much afraid that some evil had befallen their only son. His eyesight had returned to King Dyumatsena just as King Yama had

promised the Princess Savitri. But distracted by his fears for Satyavan, he felt no joy in it and searched in every direction to find some trace of him. Every time a twig cracked or a leaf fell, he looked up joyfully saying, "Satyavan and Savitri have come back," and a moment later he would groan, finding out his error. The Brahmans of his household strove to pacify him, and in a measure had succeeded, when suddenly Satyavan and Savitri came up to him unobserved. After the king had greeted them, the Brahmans lit a fire and all sat round it. Then the Brahmans questioned Satyavan saying, "O Prince, why did you loiter so late in the forest, causing such pain to your father and your mother." "Reverend Sirs," answered the prince, "I can tell you but little. While I was cutting wood in the forest my head began suddenly to ache. Then I fell asleep and slept longer than I have ever slept before." But the Brahmans turned to Savitri and said, "Wise Princess, tell us what you know. For we are greatly astonished. Prince Satyavan has never stayed away so long before. And in his absence King Dyumatsena's eyesight returned to him."

Savitri answered, "Venerable sages, the wise Narada foretold that my husband would die to-day. On that account I did not leave him. But as he has told you, he fell asleep after cutting some wood. As he slept, King Yama appeared, bound him with a noose and began to drag him away to his own kingdom in the South. But I spoke to King Yama gently, and pleased him. He therefore gave me five boons. He promised that King Dyumatsena would recover his eyesight and regain his kingdom. He promised that my father King Asvapati would beget a hundred sons. He promised that I should bear Prince Satyavan a hundred sons. And

he promised that the prince and I should each live four hundred years."

After Savitri had ended her tale, they all rose and went to their huts and slept until the sun rose. A few hours after sunrise, King Dyumatsena saw a great multitude approaching his hermitage. He came out of his hut and asked their business. "O King," they said, "we are men from the kingdom of the Salyas. We have come to tell you that your enemy has been killed by his minister, and with him have perished also his sons and his kinsmen and his followers. Therefore, O King, come back to the land of the Salyas. For we have thrown off the yoke of the foreigner and we wish you, blind though you are, to rule over us."

"My people," said King Dyumatsena, "I will gladly return to your land and reign over you. But I am no longer blind. For the Immortals have given me back my sight." When the multitude heard this, they were delighted. And they bowed to the earth before him and bade him hasten back to their land and rule over them as their king. That very day King Dyumatsena and Queen Saivya, with Prince Satyavan and Princess Savitri were borne in palanquins from the forest to the chief city of the Salya people. There the Brahmans installed Dyumatsena as king and Prince Satyavan as his successor. And King Asvapati's queen, Malavi, bore him a hundred sons. And Savitri bore to Prince Satyavan a hundred sons, strong, brave and beautiful as their father. And Prince Satyavan and Savitri became in due course king and queen of the Salya people and ruled over them until they were four hundred years old. Then they passed gently away and their subjects sorrowed over them for many a twelvemonth afterwards.

THE FROG KING'S DAUGHTER

Once upon a time there ruled in Ayodhya a great king named Parikshit[1] of the house of Ikshwaku. One day he went hunting and, wounding a stag, he galloped after it through the forest. The swiftness of his horse soon carried him far ahead of his attendants. Nevertheless he could not overtake the stag. At last his horse grew weary and could gallop no further. The king drew in his reins and, seeing a beautiful forest pool not far off, he rode towards it. Flinging aside his garments, he plunged into the pool and, when he had refreshed himself, bathed his horse also in the water. Then picketing the horse on the bank and throwing a bundle of lotus stalks in front of it, he lay down by its side and was soon fast asleep.

The king had been asleep for what seemed to him but a few minutes, when he woke up, hearing the most beautiful voice in the world singing a lilting melody. He rubbed his eyes and looked around him but could see no one. Yet the voice went on singing. At last the king sprang to his feet and pushed his way through the neighbouring bushes until he came to a tiny glade. It was carpeted with grass and wild flowers and a damsel of surpassing beauty was singing as she plucked the flowers. The king fell in love with her on the spot and thought to himself that unless she married him life would have no further pleasure for him. "Fair lady," he said, "who are you and what man is so lucky as to call you wife?" "Fair Sir," said the girl, "I am a maiden and

1 This Parikshit was not Parikshit the Bharata the grandson of Arjuna, but of the house of Ikshwaku, that is to say of the same line as that in which the hero Ramachandra was born.

no man's wife." "Then lovely maiden," said the king, "wed me and be Queen of Ayodhya." The damsel at first would not answer, but blushing looked shyly at the ground and then at the tall figure of the king. At last after King Parikshit had pressed her repeatedly for an answer she said: "O king, I can only be your queen on one condition." "I readily agree," said the king, "to any condition that you name, if only you will be my bride." "My condition is this," continued the maiden gravely; "never let me look at water on the ground." The king agreed and wedded her at once according to the rites of the Gandharva marriage. After the marriage was completed the royal attendants, who had been following the tracks of the king, came up. And King Parikshit showed them his royal bride and all the attendants paid her their homage. The king entered a palanquin with his bride and its porters carried them back to the city of Ayodhya. When King Parikshit reached the palace, such was his love for the beautiful forest maiden that he shut himself with her inside his own private rooms and would not receive any of his ministers or his officers of state. The chief minister, fearing for the safety of the kingdom, made secret enquiries of the women who waited on the new queen and asked them what kind of a woman she was. "O minister," said the palace women, "we do not ourselves know what sort of a woman she is. In beauty no maiden equals her. But she has exacted a strange promise from our lord, namely, that he should never allow her to look at water on the ground. Beyond this we know nothing." The chief minister went home. Next morning he gathered labourers together, and made a beautiful pleasure garden not far from the city. In it he planted noble trees

KING PARIKSHIT AND THE FROG KING'S DAUGHTER

and mango orchards and row after row of flower beds. And far away in a corner of the grounds he dug a lake and filled it with water by turning a stream into it. When the work was finished he sought an audience of the king. Reluctantly the king left his beautiful bride and received his chief minister. " O King," said the minister, " the summer heat grows daily greater. I have made a pleasure garden not far from Ayodhya. It has noble trees and orchards and flower beds. And no water can be found anywhere in it. Therefore, O King, hasten there with your queen and pass the summer days pleasantly."

The king gladly accepted the minister's gift. Causing his chariot to be harnessed he drove with all speed to the minister's pleasure garden. And he took with him his lovely forest bride. For days together the king and the queen wandered through the garden marvelling at its beauty and at the skill with which the chief minister's workmen had designed it. One day they strayed into the distant corner of the park, where the chief minister had dug a lake. At first they did not see it; the flowering shrubs grew so thickly along its banks. Then it happened that the king, pushing aside the foliage, forced his way to the edge of the lake. Its waters mirrored the deep blue of the sky and yet were so transparent that the king could see the fish swimming along the bottom of the lake or chasing each other just below the surface. Instantly a desire seized him to swim in its waters. For the day was hot and he was weary with walking through the great park. Stripping off his clothes, he plunged into the water and, swimming hither and thither, he called to his queen to follow him into the lake. Without a word the forest damsel came to the bank and plunged beneath the crystal waters with the skill of a practised swimmer.

The king watched her with approval and waited for her to come once more to the surface. But she never came. Parikshit, fearing that she had been caught in some weeds, dived to the bottom of the lake. But although he swam with open eyes all over the bottom he saw his beautiful queen nowhere. At last, despairing and frightened, he swam to the bank, put on his clothes again, sent for his chariot and drove with all speed to Ayodhya. There he told the chief minister what had befallen the queen and, gathering together a great company of labourers, he had all the water of the lake pumped out. Nowhere, however, could the queen's body be found. There was nothing but a huge frog sitting by a hole. And when it saw the king it jumped into the hole and vanished.

Then the king turned in a fury to the chief minister saying, " That accursed frog is the cause of my sorrow. It seized my queen as she swam beneath the water, and tearing her in pieces devoured her. Do you now order my soldiers and subjects to kill all frogs wherever they see them. And proclaim to all those of my subjects who wish for an audience with me, or have petitions to present to me, that instead of the customary gift, they must bring as their offering a dead frog. "

Then throughout the land of Ayodhya a fearful slaughter of frogs took place. King Parikshit's soldiers and subjects, hearing that a frog had devoured the queen, plunged into pools and marshes and cut to pieces all frogs that they found there. And all who wanted an audience of the king or desired to petition him, gladly brought him a dead frog instead of the customary present. Day after day the massacre of the frog people continued, until at last they went in a great body

to their king Ayusha. "O king," cried the frog people, "intercede for us with King Parikshit. Otherwise, we shall soon all be destroyed by him and his soldiers."

The frog king pitied his people and disguising himself as a Brahman made his way to the palace of King Parikshit. Because of his holy garb, the guards did not require a dead frog from Ayusha, and he soon stood face to face with Parikshit.

"O Brahman," asked the king, "what is it that you desire?"

"Great king," replied Ayusha, "I pray you to forget your anger and to stop killing the frog people. They have done you no wrong. You should therefore order their slaughter to cease."

"O Brahman," retorted King Parikshit, "the frog people have done me a great wrong. One of that accursed race devoured my queen, whom I loved better than life itself. It is useless, venerable man, to plead for them, for while I live I shall not stop killing them."

"Great king," replied Ayusha, "have mercy on the frog people. I am their king and I am named Ayusha. The maiden whom you married was my daughter Sushavana. She is still alive, for she deceived you, as she has often deceived others. Therefore banish her from your mind; she is not worthy of you."

But King Parikshit paid no attention to the words of Ayusha the frog king. He longed to see the maid whom he had loved in the forest, "No, King Ayusha," he said, "even though she has deceived me and others like me, I love her and I desire her back. Give her to me and I shall forgive her the trick that she played on me." King Ayusha left King Parikshit's palace and in a short space returned, holding his lovely daughter by the hand.

King Parikshit was overjoyed at the sight of the queen. He bowed low before the frog king and in a voice choked with tears of happiness, he said, "O King Ayusha, you have conferred on me the greatest boon in all the world." King Ayusha bowed in return. But when he bade farewell to Queen Sushavana he looked at her with a frowning brow, and cursing her he said, "Because you have tricked this noble king and other noble kings before him the sons whom you bear to him will be haters of Brahmans." With these words King Ayusha went back to his home among the frog people.

II

In the course of three years Queen Sushavana bore three splendid sons to King Parikshit. The king named them Sala, Dala and Vala. When they had grown to manhood King Parikshit fell ill. And feeling death drawing near he decided to go into the forest, after the manner of Aryan princes, to be an anchorite until his life left him. He, therefore, called together his ministers and in his own place installed on the throne his eldest son Prince Sala. Then Parikshit and Sushavana walked together into the forest; and neither he nor she returned again to Ayodhya.

After Prince Sala had become king he devoted many hours of the day to hunting. Once, as he hunted, he wounded a stag and tried to overtake it in his chariot. But he could not draw near to the stag and at last his horses, tired with the chase, could go no further. The king bade his charioteer urge them with his whip But the charioteer answered, "O king, the horses are wearied to death. They will never overtake the stag. You would catch it only if you had Vami horses yoked to your cha-

riot." King Sala turned sharply to his charioteer saying, "Tell me where I can get Vami horses." But the charioteer, fearing the anger of the sage Vamadeva who owned them, held his peace. The king grew angry and lifting his sword cried, " Unless you tell me instantly where I can obtain Vami horses, I will kill you with my sword."

The charioteer, frightened at the threat said, "O king spare me and I will tell you. Vami horses are the horses of the sage Vamadeva."

" Drive directly to the hermitage of the sage Vamadeva," answered the king, putting back his sword.

The charioteer obeyed and not long afterwards the tired horses drew the king's chariot to Vamadeva's home. The sage welcomed the king and asked him what he wanted.

" Venerable Sir," said the king, " I have wounded a stag and my horses have tried in vain to catch it. I beg you to lend me your Vami horses so that I may catch the stag."

The rishi answered, " O King, I will gladly lend you my Vami horses, and they will certainly overtake the wounded stag. But give me first your royal word that when you have killed the stag, you will give me back my horses." The king gave his royal word. His charioteer led the Vami horses from Vamadeva's stable and yoked them to King Sala's chariot. They bounded after the deer as swiftly as thought, and in but a little time the king had overtaken it and killed it with an arrow. Then a wicked thought entered his mind because of the curse of Ayusha the frog king." These Vami horses," King Sala said to his charioteer, " are too good for a Brahman. They are fit only for the royal stables." Thus breaking his royal word, he caused the Vami horses to be kept in

the king's stalls at Ayodhya.

The sage Vamadeva marvelled that King Sala did not send back the Vami horses. Then he thought, "The king is young and is loth to part with them. He will in time remember his promise and will send them back to my hermitage." The sage waited a month in vain. Then he sent his pupil Atreya, who humbly asked King Sala to restore his Vami horses to Vamadeva. But King Sala scornfully answered Atreya, "Good Sir, what need has Vamadeva of Vami horses? A Brahman needs no horses like these that are swifter than the wind. They rightly belong to a Kshatriya king. I regard them as mine and I shall not give them back to Vamadeva."

Atreya returned sorrowfully to Vamadeva and gave him the king's message. Vamadeva grew very angry, and went himself to Ayodhya and obtained an audience of the king.

"King Sala," he said, "give me back my Vami horses, otherwise you will bring my curse and your destruction on yourself."

"O Vamadeva," said King Sala scornfully, "you who are a Brahman have no need of Vami horses. Take in their place two docile bulls or four mules or four asses. But the Vami horses are now mine and I shall never return them to you."

The sage looked angrily at the king and was about to curse him. Then he pitied Sala's youth and beauty and said, "O king, when I gave you the Vami horses, you gave me your royal word that you would restore them to me. Do not call down punishment on yourself by breaking the promise of an Aryan king."

"O Vamadeva," said King Sala, "Vami horses are hunting horses. A Kshatriya only is permitted to hunt.

You cannot own such horses. So go away, and vex me no more."

Vamadeva's anger rose against the lying king. "By the vows I have kept," he cried, "and the penances that I have undergone, let four hideous, armed demons rise from the earth and kill you, O king, and afterwards hew your body into four pieces."

"Good Vamadeva," laughed Sala scornfully, "call up your demons if you will, and my soldiers will kill them and you also with your disciples. For a Brahman who wishes to take life is an evil Brahman ; I shall thus incur no sin by causing your death."

As the words left the king's lips, four hideous demons rose from the ground and rushed towards King Sala with raised lances. Even then the sage would have spared King Sala. But the king called out defiantly, "Though all the heroes of the house of Ikshwaku bade me free your Vami horses, even then I would not free them." Vamadeva, hearing him, no longer pitied him, and the four demons rushing at King Sala drove their lances into him and hewed him into four pieces. The rishi Vamadeva then returned to his forest home and the men of Ayodhya made King Sala's brother, Prince Dala, king over them.

Vamadeva waited for a month but King Dala did not return him the Vami horses. So the sage once more went to Ayodhya and obtained an audience of the king.

"O king," he said, "if you are afraid to sin, give me back my Vami horses. For they are mine, and in keeping them you act unjustly."

King Dala bade his charioteer bring him his bow and quiver. Taking from the quiver a poisoned arrow, he said, "I will shoot Vamadeva with my arrow, and as

he lies on the ground I will have him torn in pieces by dogs."

"Beware, O king," answered Vamadeva; "the arrow which you aim at me will pierce the heart of your ten-year-old son."

But King Dala scorned the rishi's words, and the arrow, passing by Vamadeva, entered the inner room where the young prince was, and pierced him to the heart. King Dala, more angered than before, took another poisonous arrow from his quiver and aimed it at Vamadeva. But Vamadeva said, "O king, you cannot shoot the arrow at me." And as he spoke he cast a spell over the king, so that he could not bend the bow. Then King Dala saw that it was useless to strive against Vamadeva. "O Vamadeva," he said, "you have overcome me. May your years be many."

Vamadeva pitied King Dala as he had pitied his brother and he said, "Touch your Queen Senajata with your arrow and you will be forgiven your sin." King Dala obeyed the rishi's words. Senajata then said, "O Vamadeva, forgive my husband the king and teach him to grow in wisdom." "Fair queen," said Vamadeva, "you have saved the house of Ikshwaku by your words. Ask me a boon and it shall be granted to you."

"Holy sir," replied the queen, "the boon that I ask of you is this. Free my husband and his house from the curse which Ayusha the frog king cast upon them, because of Sushavana's conduct." "So be it," said the rishi. Then going into the inner room he drew the poisoned arrow from the young prince's heart and restored him to life. Seeing this, King Dala bowed to Vamadeva's feet and bade his charioteer restore the Vami horses to the rishi.

THE DESCENT OF THE GANGES

To-day the Ganges rises beyond the Himalaya Mountains and flowing through the northern plains of India finds an outlet at last for her mighty waters in the Bay of Bengal. There was, however, a time when the Ganges did not flow upon the earth at all but was the River of Heaven and issued from the foot of the great god Vishnu.

Many years after Garuda had won the ambrosia jar for the snake people and Aruna had become the charioteer of the Sun, Queen Vinata gave birth to a daughter. Her name was Sumati and when she grew up, Queen Vinata married her to King Sagar of Ayodhya. Now Sagar had an elder wife called Keshini and she had no children. King Sagar hoped by a second marriage to obtain a son, but after some years it seemed as if Sumati would remain as barren as Keshini before her. At last King Sagar in despair went with his two queens to the Himalayas and there performed many sacrifices and went through great penances in honour of the sage Vrigu. At last the heart of the famous anchorite was touched. " King Sagar," he said, " for many years past you and your two queens have done me great honour, and if you so wish it, I am ready to confer a boon upon each of them. "Holy Sage," replied the grateful Prince, " I pray you ask my two queens what boons they desire." Vrigu turned to Keshini and Sumati, " Fair Queens," he said, "tell me what boons you wish for." Both the queens answered, " Holy sir, we want sons."

" I give you two boons," said Vrigu. " One of you shall have a son who shall live to perpetuate your husband's line. The other shall have sixty thousand sons, none of whom shall have any issue."

As Keshini was the elder wife, King Sagar bade her choose the boon which pleased her. "King Sagar," she replied, "I choose a single son who shall live to carry on your line." King Sagar took his two queens back to his capital. A few months later, Queen Keshini bore a son to whom King Sagar gave the name of Asamanja. Shortly afterwards Queen Sumati gave birth to a gourd. She kept it in a warm place until it ripened. Then she opened it and found inside sixty thousand baby boys.

In the course of time Asamanja and his sixty thousand brothers grew from babyhood to boyhood. But Asamanja tormented his brothers, and one day pushed them into the waters of a river from which they were with difficulty rescued. King Sagar's anger was kindled against Prince Asamanja and he banished him from the kingdom. The prince left it as ordered by his father and was never heard of again. But before Asamanja departed he had been married; and his wife had borne him a son called Anshumat.

Now when all King Sagar's sixty thousand sons had grown to manhood, the king in his pride of them resolved to hold an *Aswamedha* sacrifice. He appointed his grandson Anshumat, now grown a youth, to command an army and to go forth with a horse from the royal stables. From all men who lived in the countries through which the horse roamed, Prince Anshumat was to exact tribute or to kill them. In a year's time the prince was to bring back the horse. King Sagar would then sacrifice it to the immortal gods. Prince Anshumat gladly obeyed the king's words, and taking the best horse out of the king's stables he set it free to roam at will. And always behind the horse followed Prince Anshumat and the royal army.

Now pride on the part of mortals is always hateful to the gods. So to punish King Sagar, the great god Vishnu disguised himself as an old woman in order that he might steal the sacrificial horse. One evening as Prince Anshumat was about to halt for the night with his army, he saw an aged woman coming towards him. "Fair Prince," said the woman, "I am weary and starving. If you give me a night's food and lodging, I shall always be grateful to you." The prince had not the heart to refuse her prayer for she looked thin and careworn. "Give her some food," he said to his attendants, "and let her sleep on a bed of hay near the stables." The attendants led the old woman away, gave her food, and threw down a cartload of grass for her to sleep on. Some hours later the old woman rose, and while the army slept, she loosened the picketing ropes of the sacrificial horse, mounted it and galloped away at full speed. The thunder of its hoofs woke the army. The troopers saddled their horses as quickly as they could. But by the time that they were ready to follow the fleeing horse, it had completely vanished. All that night and for several days afterwards, they searched for it in vain. At last Prince Anshumat said, "I shall waste no more time in this vain quest. I must go back to my grandfather and crave his pardon. He will, I am sure, forgive me, for how could I have guessed that an old woman would steal the sacrificial horse?" Prince Anshumat returned to his grandfather and told him what had happened. King Sagar readily forgave him saying, "I do not blame you, Prince Anshumat; for kindness of heart befits the young." Then he turned to his sixty thousand sons. "My gallant sons," he said, "you must avenge this insult. The old woman was the tool of

some rival king. Cross the whole earth until you find the horse. Then kill its thief and bring it back".

Immediately the sixty thousand sons put on their armour and taking their weapons set forth to seek the missing horse. They searched in vain over the whole surface of India until they came to the Western Ocean. Then they said, "The horse-thief must have hidden King Sagar's horse beyond the seven seas. We must therefore dig through the earth in various places, so that when we have reached its other side we may find our father's steed."

With these words King Sagar's sons began to dig, and they dug with such a will that in no long time they came to the very centre of the earth, where the snake people lived. They heeded not the snake people but digging their tunnel as before they came out in a few months on the eastern quarter of the opposite side of the earth. There they beheld a giant elephant. "Noble elephant," said King Sagar's sons, "who are you?" "My name is Virupaksha," replied the elephant, "and I hold up the eastern end of the earth. But what are you here for?" "We have come," said King Sagar's sons, "to look for our father's horse. Have you by any chance seen it, and an old woman with it?" "No," said Virupaksha, "I have not." As he spoke he shook his head and a terrible earthquake shook the whole country round.

King Sagar's sons said, "This noble elephant has no reason to lie. Our horse is surely not here. Let us search in some other region." They returned to the centre of the earth and began to bore a fresh tunnel, which in due course pierced the southern quarter of the opposite side of the earth. When they emerged into the daylight, they saw yet another elephant. "Noble ele-

phant," said King Sagar's sons, "who are you and what are you doing here?" "My name is Mahapadma," said the elephant, "and I hold up the southern end of the earth." "Have you by any chance, noble elephant," asked King Sagar's sons, "seen our father's horse led by an aged woman." "No," said Mahapadma, "I have not." "This noble elephant too must be speaking the truth," said King Sagar's sons, "let us search for our steed elsewhere." Back they went to the centre of the earth and bored a third-tunnel, which came out on the western quarter of the opposite side of the earth. There they saw a third elephant, who seemed to their astonished eyes like one of the Vindhya mountains.

"Noble elephant," asked the sons of King Sagar, "who are you and what are you doing here?" "My name is Saumanasa," said the elephant, "and I hold up the western quarter of the earth." "Noble Saumanasa," asked the sons of King Sagar, "has there passed by you a beautiful steed led by an aged woman?" "No," said the elephant, "I have not seen it". King Sagar's sons walked back to the centre of the earth and drove a fourth tunnel through to the North Pole. When they emerged, it was to see the land covered with ice and snow. Not far from them stood a fourth elephant. He was as white as snow; his feet were hidden in drifts and his tusks were half buried in a glacier. "Noble elephant," said King Sagar's sons, "what is your name and why are you here?" "My name is Bhadra," replied the elephant, "and I hold up the northern end of the earth." "Then, noble elephant, tell us," said King Sagar's sons, "whether you have seen our father's steed. He was making a great horse sacrifice and would have ended it duly; but an aged woman stole the horse and

spoiled the sacrifice." "No," said the elephant Bhadra. As he spoke he stamped his mighty feet and the ice floes cracked, and the bergs crashed together, and the freed seas roared and thundered with each stamp of the monster's feet. Silently King Sagar's sons returned to the centre of the earth and bored a fifth tunnel, which brought them out at the north-east quarter of the other side of the earth. Round them stretched an endless, meadow and on it they saw grazing the very steed which King Sagar had sent out with Prince Anshumat. Not far from it they saw the old woman who had stolen it. With drawn swords they ran forward to kill her. But suddenly the old woman changed into a god-like form. Two mighty columns of fire shot out from the eyes of the divine being and in a moment all that remained of King Sagar's sixty thousand sons was as many heaps of smouldering ashes.

II

For a year King Sagar waited in vain for news of his sixty thousand sons. At last he said to Prince Anshumat, "My grandson, I fear that some evil has overtaken my sons. Go and seek for them. For my heart is heavy within me."

Prince Anshumat gladly assented and taking the king's sword and his own bow went off alone to search for his uncles. The young prince wandered through all the countries of India, but though he learnt that King Sagar's sons had passed through many lands, he could find them nowhere. At last he came to the shores of the ocean. Not far from its waters, the prince saw great mounds of sand. Going close to them he found that they marked the mouth of the mighty tunnel which his

uncles had first bored. The tunnel was dark and fearsome but the heart of the young prince never failed him. Drawing his sword, he walked through the tunnel until he came to the centre of the earth. There he saw five tunnels all as large as the one by which he had come. Entering the nearest one he walked along it until he came out at the eastern corner of the other side of the earth. There he saw the great elephant Virupaksha. Walking round the elephant to show his respect, Prince Anshumat said, "Noble elephant, I seek my sixty thousand uncles. Tell me, I pray you, if they have come this way." "They did indeed come this way," answered Virupaksha, "but they went away, and where they went afterwards I do not know." Prince Anshumat, undismayed, walked back through the tunnel until he again reached the centre of the earth. Then entering the next tunnel he walked along it until he came out at the southern quarter of the opposite side of the earth. There he saw the elephant Mahapadma. Walking round him to show his respect, Prince Anshumat said, "Noble elephant, have you by any chance seen my sixty thousand uncles? For they went out to seek their father's sacrificial horse but they never returned." The giant elephant said, "Young Prince, your uncles did indeed come this way, but seek them elsewhere, for they did not remain here." Back went the prince to the centre of the earth and then up through the third tunnel which led him to the western quarter of the other side of the earth. There he saw the mountainous Saumanasa. "Noble elephant," said the prince deferentially, "I have lost my sixty thousand uncles. Are they by any chance in this quarter of the world?" "They came here," said Saumanasa, "but they went away, I do

not know where." The young prince went back through the tunnel and entered the one leading to the northern quarter of the other side of the earth. There he saw the elephant Bhadra. At first Anshumat thought that he was only a giant berg that rose out of the ice floe. But after a time he saw that he was an elephant. "Noble elephant," said the young prince, "my sixty thousand uncles set forth to seek my grandfather's horse. But they have never returned." But Bhadra said never a word in reply; and the grey mists rose up from the frozen seas and gradually hid him from the young prince's eyes. And the snow began to fall in great flakes and the frost began to spread its numbness over Anshumat's limbs, until he longed to lie down and sleep alongside the elephant Bhadra for ever and ever. But with a great effort the young prince roused himself. "If I stay here much longer," he mused, "I shall become as silent as yonder elephant. Then I shall never do the task which my grandfather the king set me." Turning his back on Bhadra, Anshumat walked back again to the centre of the earth. Then walking through the last tunnel he came out at the north-eastern quarter of the opposite side of the earth.

A hundred yards or so away, he saw a horse grazing, which he at once knew to be King Sagar's sacrificial horse. He called to it, and it gave a joyful whinny and galloped up to him. For he had always cared for and caressed it. The prince patted it and fondled it. Then he looked around him and saw heap after heap of ashes scattered all over the plain. Going close to them, he saw that they were the charred remains of what had once been human beings and he recognized the weapons scattered among the ashes as those of his uncles. The

prince wept when he saw that his uncles had perished. Then sadly and slowly he led his grandfather's horse back through the tunnel to the centre of the earth and then through that which led to the shores of the western sea. Here by chance he met Garuda, who had descended from heaven to make war upon the snake people, whom he hated because of his former slavery. "Young prince, my kinsman," said Garuda, "what are you doing here and where are you leading this horse?" Prince Anshumat told Garuda all that had happened and then continued: "I am leading the sacrificial horse to my grandfather, but I do not know how he will perform the sacrificial rites due to my gallant uncles. There is but little water near Ayodhya and much will be needed if due honour is to be paid to the dead princes." Garuda said, "Tell King Sagar that Vishnu slew his sons to punish him for his pride. But if he humbles himself to the immortal gods, they may possibly forgive him and Vishnu may send his divine river the Ganges from heaven to earth. If this should happen, King Sagar will have more than enough water with which to honour the ashes of his sixty thousand sons." Heavy at heart, Prince Anshumat continued his journey to Ayodhya. When he reached his grandfather's capital, he told King Sagar all that had happened and then led away the sacrificial horse to the royal stable. The news of the death of his sons broke King Sagar's heart. He died and Anshumat became king in his place. And when Anshumat in turn was gathered to his fathers his son Dilip succeeded him. After Dilip, Dilip's son Bhagirath ascended the throne of Ayodhya. And Anshumat, Dilip and Bhagirath, all in turn strove year after year to soften the hearts of the immortals

by their prayers and so to induce them to obtain from Vishnu the gift of the Ganges River. At last, moved by the ceaseless prayers of the Ayodhya kings, the god Brahmadeva revealed himself to King Bhagirath.

"King Bhagirath," said the great god, "I am pleased with your devotion and that of your father and grandfather. And I am ready to give you any boon which you wish to have." "Lord Brahmadeva," said King Bhagirath, "the boon that I crave is a great one. Nevertheless in your mercy vouchsafe it to me! Let the Lord Vishnu send down the River Ganges from heaven to earth so that I may fitly perform the obsequies of King Sagar's sons and thus give rest to their spirits." "I grant you the boon, King Bhagirath," said the god Brahmadeva. But the Ganges River will break through the earth's surface in its descent and will vanish beneath it. Pray, therefore, to the Lord Shiva that he may break its fall, so that it may flow gently upon the earth's surface".

With these words the god Brahmadeva vanished and King Bhagirath for a whole year worshipped the god Shiva. At last Shiva revealed himself to the king and said, "King Bhagirath, you have worshipped me unceasingly for twelve months past. I am pleased with you. Ask of me a boon." "Lord Shiva," said the king, "the god Brahmadeva has promised to obtain for me the heavenly river Ganges. But he tells me that the Ganges will in its descent force its way to the centre of the earth. The boon, therefore, which I ask of you, Lord Shiva, is this. Hold back the Ganges River when it falls on earth and force it to flow gently over the earth's surface to the sea. Thus I will be able to pay the honours due to King Sagar's sixty thousand sons and so give rest to their spirits." The Lord Shiva said, "O King, I grant

you the boon you ask," and a moment later he had vanished from King Bhagirath's sight. The Lord Brahmadeva went to Vaikunth to speak with the Lord Vishnu and obtained from him a promise to send down the Ganges River to earth. A few moments later the inhabitants of King Bhagirath's kingdom saw a more wonderful sight than they could ever have imagined. Above their heads the skies opened. A gigantic column of water miles wide shot forth with terrific speed from the heavens towards the earth. It was teeming with life of all kinds and in the mass of waters the people of Ayodhya could distinctly see fish in myriads and water-tortoises and crocodiles. But they held their hands before their faces in terror, because they feared that the mass of water would destroy all things living upon the earth.

Suddenly they saw a mighty figure stand out upon one of the mountains to the north of Ayodhya city. As he stood, his hairs grew until they stretched to every point of the horizon. And as the foaming mass neared the earth the hairs drew together the falling waters and held them firmly imprisoned. Thus the Lord Shiva stopped the Ganges River. It was in vain that for a whole year the mighty stream dashed in and out of the great god's locks. Nowhere could she find an outlet. At last she prayed to the great god to release her and promised that if he would, she would not plunge through the earth but would flow over its surface until she lost herself in the ocean. After the Ganges had made the promise the god Shiva shook his head. Then streams splashed out in all directions from the god's locks to the earth. But the bulk of the heavenly river fell to the east and then flowing through the northern plains rolled mild and peaceful towards the sea.

Now in the course taken by the river Ganges a mighty rishi called Jahnu, had his home. As the great river came towards Jahnu, the villagers ran away to the neighbouring heights. But Jahnu sat on muttering to himself spells of fearful power. Nearer and nearer came the river until its waves began to trickle over the sage's feet. Suddenly a terrible flash of fire shot out of the rishi's eyes. He turned his face, black with anger, towards the oncoming stream. There was a gulp and a gurgle and not a trace of the Ganges was to be seen. On beholding this King Bhagirath's heart sank within him. But he did not give way to despair. He sacrificed to the mighty rishi day after day and month after month. At the same time he besieged heaven with his prayers, so that the immortals might intercede for him with Jahnu and obtain the river's release. The gods had pity on the king and addressing the rishi Jahnu added their prayers to his. "Let the Ganges be your daughter," said the Lord Brahmadeva to Jahnu, "let her be called Jahnavi and so she will perpetuate your name and your fame forever". At last the sage Jahnu relented. Two gigantic streams of water spouted out of his ears and the Ganges River once more flowed to the sea. King Bhagirath was overjoyed. But for fear that further ill fortune might befall the heavenly stream he called to her and bade her follow his chariot, as he led her eastwards to the sea.

When the Ganges river had rolled to the ocean, King Bhagirath knew that his task was fulfilled. He had now more than enough water with which to pay due honours to his dead kinsmen, the sixty thousand sons of King Sagar. He sent for their ashes from the distant spot where they had fallen. Then he held an unceas-

ing round of sacrifices until all of them had received due honour and until their spirits had found rest for ever.

And ever since that time the Ganges has flowed seawards without any wish to return to her heavenly home. But men to-day in India still call the sea the "Sagar" in memory of the sixty thousand princes who, unable to cross it, dug their way through and through the earth. And because the Ganges was adopted by the Rishi Jahnu as his daughter, she is still sometimes called the Jahnavi River. But she is also known as the Bhagirathi, because it was King Bhagirath who by his prayers brought her down from heaven and led her safely in his chariot until she lost herself in the ocean.

THE TALE OF THE POLE STAR

Once upon a time there lived a great king in India whose name was Uttanpad. He had two wives, one named Suniti and the other Suruchi. The former had a beautiful nature and the latter a beautiful face. And just like other kings in other parts of the world, King Uttanpad neglected the queen with the beautiful nature to grow every day more in love with the queen with the beautiful face.

Now by Suruchi King Uttanpad had a little boy called Uttam and by Suniti he had a little boy called Dhruv. Uttam was six and Dhruv was five and each of them inherited the qualities of his mother. King Uttanpad loved them both but because of Suruchi's jealousy he dared not fondle Dhruv in her presence. One day the king was telling the two little boys a story and had Dhruv

QUEEN SURUCHI AND DHRUV

on his knee. Queen Suruchi entered the room, and furious at the sight, gave Dhruv a push so that he fell over backwards. Prince Dhruv pleaded that he was King Uttanpad's son just as much as Uttam was. But Queen Suruchi grew very angry and bade him go and pray to the gods. For until they pitied him and let him be born again as her son, King Uttanpad would never take him on his knee again.

Little Dhruv went to his mother Suniti and told her what had happened. Suniti told him to pray to the god Krishna. So little Dhruv said that he would go into the forest and pray to Krishna and when he had done so he would return and tell her. But once he had entered the forest he prayed and prayed and prayed so that he never thought of returning, and lived on roots and water. And as he prayed years passed by until the god Krishna, pleased with the boy's devotion, revealed himself and offered him a boon. "Take me with you, O Lord, back to heaven," said Dhruv. "No," said Krishna, "that cannot be. You have yet to go to your father's country and reign over it and bring it happiness. In due time I shall send for you." Dhruv consented. And the god Krishna sent the great sage Narada to lead him back to his father's town. Narada took the prince's hand in his and led him back to King Uttanpad's city.

For many years the king had mourned for Dhruv as one long dead. But when Narada sent word to him that Prince Dhruv had returned, the king made great preparations to welcome him. Seated in a golden howdah carried by the king's own elephant and shaded by the royal umbrella, Prince Dhruv was borne back to his father's palace. And as he passed through the streets, all the maidens, peep-

ing at him through the chinks in the walls or from the corners of the windows, wondered at the handsome prince. And all the matrons and aged dames showered flowers on him from their balconies and roofs. For all were overjoyed at his return except only Prince Uttam and his mother Queen Suruchi. For Prince Uttam had grown into a selfish, jealous man and he was furious that his brother should receive such favour from the king and such honour from the people. And Queen Suruchi hated Prince Dhruv as a possible rival to her own son. Thus although the king and Queen Suniti and the nobles and the ministers welcomed Prince Dhruv and tried to outbid each other in the warmth of their greeting, his brother would barely look in his direction and Queen Suruchi muttered to herself, but so loudly that the bystanders heard, "If only the brat had died in the forest!"

Prince Dhruv did his utmost to win their love, but all to no purpose. Prince Uttam and Queen Suruchi sought every day to humiliate him. At last the king rebuked Prince Uttam. Then the young man's anger knew no bounds. He begged the king for leave to go out with an army that was about to attack a forest tribe who for some months past had revolted against the king's authority. The king gave his son leave to go and placed him at the head of the horse-soldiers but under the orders of the general. Prince Uttam, however, was vain and wayward. He would not heed the advice of his father's general. But taking his horsemen with him he marched ahead of the foot-soldiers into the forest. There the forest tribes easily lured the prince into an ambush and slew him and all the men with him. When the sad news reached the capital, King Uttanpad

sent out Prince Dhruv and a band of fresh horsemen. He and the king's general fully avenged Prince Uttam's death, and with great pomp and laden with spoil and captives Prince Dhruv and the army returned in triumph.

But the loss of her son and the triumph of Prince Dhruv unsettled Queen Suruchi's mind. One day she ran out of the city and into the woods and was never heard of afterwards. Then King Uttanpad felt that the time had come for him, as an Aryan king, to resign his crown to his son. So he gave up his robes and sceptre to Prince Dhruv and in the garb of a pilgrim wandered forth into the forest and there led the life of an ascetic until death freed him.

Then King Dhruv ruled in his father's place. And for many a score of years he ruled beloved by his subjects. And his armies were always victorious and the frontiers of his kingdom daily widened and no monarch in all India was so greatly feared or honoured as he. Yet his heart was always sad. For he often thought with sighs of the happy years in which as a boy he had worshipped Krishna in the Madhu forest. And often he said to himself, "Fool that I was to return to my father's home. How happy I should have been had I but spent my life in the woods, worshipping the god Krishna. In the end he would surely have borne me away and gathered me to his bosom."

One day he could bear it no longer and handing over the reigns of sovereignty to his son he made his way back to the Madhu forest on the banks of the Yamuna. He came at last to his old hermitage and suddenly in front of him he saw what he had never seen when he lived there before—a rugged path which rose

steeply towards the North. Dhruv paused a moment, but a voice within him seemed to bid him follow the path. He did so, but it never seemed to end. It grew steeper and steeper and steeper. And King Dhruv would have fainted by the way had he not seemed to hear divine voices urging him onwards. Flowers too came floating on the breeze as if showered down by hands far above him. So he struggled on until at last he came to the abodes of the Sun and Moon.

"Stay with us, King Dhruv," cried the Sun-god and the Moon-god. There is no place beyond us. So stay with us and be welcome."

"Nay," said King Dhruv, "I must go until I reach the end of the path that stretches in front of me."

And indeed the path ran right through the abodes of the Moon-god and the Sun-god and lost itself in the distance beyond. So, weary with labour and years, Dhruv climbed upwards until he came to where the seven rishis lived.

"Stay with us, bold prince," cried the seven rishis. We need a mortal to whom to teach our lore." King Dhruv bowed to the seven rishis. "Incomparable sages," he replied, "if I could stay with you I gladly would, so that I could learn your priceless wisdom. But I desire to worship the god Krishna and until I find the place to which he directs me I must follow this path." So the king went on towards the North along the path which never seemed to end. And the seven sages watched him as he went. At last they saw him reach the end of the path. For it stopped suddenly and a bottomless chasm yawned in front of Dhruv. There they saw him sit down and cast up his eyes in silent adoration of the god whom he had loved and sought.

And as the sages watched Dhruv, they saw him gradually lose his human shape and become a shining form. For as he prayed, there entered into him the spirit of the mighty god. And as they watched him, they too turned into shining forms and they too remained motionless in silent contemplation of the saintly king.

And on any cloudless night, if you look up at the sky, you will see a constellation flung like a saucepan right across it. And if you look at the far side of the saucepan and follow the direction in which the stars which form it are pointing, you will see all by itself a beautiful, clear star that points ever to the far North beyond which the god Krishna has his throne. For the saucepan-like constellation is that which Indians call the Seven Sages. But in the West it is known as the Great Bear. And the lonely star to which the seven rishis ever silently point is Dhruv.

For Dhruv is the Pole Star.

Printed by V. P. Pendherkar at the Tutorial Press, 211a, Girgaon Back Road, Bombay.